War and Image:
Viewing the Spanish Civil War in the American Picture Magazine

by

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Introduction

In mid-July of 1936, just as the United States was beginning to achieve a semblance of economic stability in the wake of the Great Depression, the Spanish Civil War broke out. Within a few days, it became apparent that the intended coup d’état had failed to overthrow the democratically elected Popular Front government and what might have been passed off as an insurrection was quickly becoming a divisive civil war. Very soon after, images of Spain’s civil war found their way across the Atlantic. Susan Sontag described the unique historical position of these images in stating: “The Spanish Civil War was the first war to be witnessed (“covered”) in the modern sense: by a corps of professional photographers at the lines of military engagement and in the towns under bombardment, whose work was immediately seen in newspapers and magazines in Spain and abroad.”¹

This study traces the nature and evolution of photographic coverage of the Spanish Civil War as the images appeared in the United States, focusing on the widely distributed picture magazine Life and the lesser known, but more evocative Photo-History. Significantly pre-dating Americans’ widespread access to television, which became ubiquitous in the 1960s, and the internet, which has significantly shaped the contemporary viewing of global conflicts, the Spanish Civil War was reported to the American public through entirely pre-digital means. Picture magazines served as the primary vehicles by which Americans viewed images of the war. Life reached an

audience numbering in the millions every week and provided readers with serialized coverage of the war, initially expressing understated support for the Republican cause by subtly critiquing the Nationalist faction within its coverage of both warring camps.\(^2\)

_Photo-History_, which appeared on newsstands in March of 1937, openly supported the Republican cause in its written content while presenting images as if self-explanatory documents. Although _Photo-History_ made its editorial bias clear through short blocks of text, systematic use of statistics and newspaper clippings, it nevertheless presented images as simple documentary tools illustrating the stance and realities the magazine endorsed. In both _Life_ and _Photo-History_, the Spanish Civil War was acknowledged as a critical news event of the day—as a “rehearsal” to the impending World War—and an issue of common interest to the American people, regardless of their stance on the war.

The images presented in _Life_ and _Photo-History_ generally embody the realist aesthetic of straight photography, visually situating them within the objective ken of news discourse. The value of the photo as a document was placed in the directness of its technique with the photographer as witness, while the act of contextualizing the image through graphic and textual layout was not perceived as a form of intervention that disqualified the inherent truth of the image either by editors or audiences.

\(^2\) There remains some difficulty in naming the two warring factions in the Spanish Civil War. Any choice of names implies a specific point of view and bias, but the names most commonly used to describe the opponents are the Nationalists and the Republicans. The Nationalist movement was given its name during the war by the supporters of General Franco’s uprising, who believed the democratic Spanish Republic to be un-Spanish by nature, and regarded themselves as the only true Spaniards. The term “Nationalist” endured mainly as a result of Franco’s monolithic control of Spain for the forty years proceeding the Spanish Civil War, although during the Civil War, both in Spain and abroad, Nationalists were disparagingly referred to as the _sublevados_ (“Rebels”) or “Insurgents.” The Republicans, known in more connotative terms as the “Loyalists” or pejoratively as “Reds,” were united in their defense of the Republic, but were in fact made up of diverse groups of individuals including republicans, socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, communists, and other small interest groups. Although sources referenced here use other terms or symbols to refer to the warring factions of the Spanish Civil War, the terms Nationalist and Republican will be used exclusively in this paper. For more on the semiotics of naming in the Spanish Civil War, see O.W. Riegel, “Press, Radio, and the Spanish Civil War,” _The Public Opinion Quarterly_, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1937), 131-36.
Concurrent with the birth of the American picture magazine, the concept of the photograph as a documentary tool was being explored by the photographers of the federally funded Farm Security Administration (FSA),\(^3\) images were reproduced in newspapers and magazines with increasing frequency, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal was constructing the physical and governmental infrastructure to pull the American economy out of the Great Depression and into an age of unprecedented domestic production and consumption. The American public had begun to see images of the horrors wrought by World War I\(^4\)—which had seen both the first pairing of camera and combat vehicle as well as the first organized ban on press photography at the warfront—but “the war to end all wars” felt like a far-off dream to many Americans who found themselves in the midst of a profound economic, political, and cultural upheaval. Dwelling on the past atrocities of World War I seemed counterintuitive to the popular movement towards social unity and reform facilitated by the burgeoning relations between corporate capital and the state being negotiated on a national level.\(^5\) The time was ripe for change, both domestically and abroad, and American picture magazines were poised to become a reflection the ensuing transitions.

Four months after the Spanish Civil War broke out, the first edition of *Life* magazine hit American newsstands. In contrast to newspaper coverage of the war, which used at most one image to accompany a written article, *Life* used photographs as the primary means of conveying news with either brief captions to contextualize

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individual images or short paragraphs to accompany longer photo essays. In noting that the images of the Spanish Civil War were seen immediately by large audiences across the globe, a critical distinction is made concerning the images of the Spanish Civil War in regard to their considerable accessibility and in comparison to their predecessors. Not only did the images have a sense of immediacy, but they allowed the growing readership of the American press to feel connected to events occurring across vast distances and cultural divides. As Jorge Lewinski stated,

>A photograph that reveals something which has just happened, which may still be going on, calls forth a more vivid, personal, emotional response. It is for this reason that the impact of the photographs of the First World War was cushioned, for they only appeared long after the event. […] The photographs of the Second World War, though powerful and dramatic in themselves, were not published immediately after they were taken and were heavily censored.\[^{6}\]

In contrast to the “heavily censored” images of World War II, the American press had little incentive to conceal or suppress images of the Spanish Civil War. The American audience that viewed the images of the Spanish Civil War was situated in an incredibly unique position both in the history of photography that made feasible images of all phases of modern warfare, and the development of modern media that served to grant access to such images. Furthermore, since the Spanish Civil War confronted many of the same conflicting ideologies and warfare techniques that came to a head in World War II, the picturing of the Spanish Civil War served to inform the contemporaneous viewing of modern warfare. It is perhaps then in the images of the Spanish Civil War that the experience of the isolated spectator of war formed its foundations.

Given the Spanish Civil War’s unique status as a starting point for the modern viewing and mediated understanding of war, a brief summary of the Spanish Civil War

will help provide the context for the variety of images chosen and presented in American picture magazines.

Coordinated uprisings against the democratically elected Spanish Republic were scheduled to take place on Saturday July 18th, but on the evening of July 17, 1936, rebellion broke out prematurely in Melilla, in Spanish-held Morocco. In what had been envisaged as a swift military coup to replace an “incompetent” Popular Front government with a military junta able to “save authority in a disintegrating society,” the attempted coup d’état developed into a 32-month long fratricidal civil war with massive human and material losses. With the outbreak of the war, the country quickly fractured geographically and ideologically along Republican and Nationalist lines as the Spanish Republic saw a rapid secession of three prime ministers in two days with general chaos prevailing. By the end of four days of fighting, Nationalists controlled about a third of Spain (mostly in the Northwestern part of the country), but had failed to capture any of Spain’s four industrial cities and were far from fully controlling Galicia, Asturias, and Andalusia. General Francisco Franco took over command of all the Nationalist armies on July 20 just days before both Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini agreed to pledge their military support.

A policy of appeasement abroad was established as the Non-Intervention Pact was drawn up in late-August 1936, which institutionalized refusal to supply arms to the beleaguered Republic. According to international law, it was unequivocally stated that a

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9 On July 25th Hitler agreed to Franco’s request for aid, and on July 30th three Italian planes crashed or made forced landings en route to Spanish Morocco, thus providing “conclusive evidence of foreign intervention and making the international and ideological implications of the domestic conflict explicit.” Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography: A Cultural History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 10.
constitutional government had the right to buy arms to suppress an internal revolt. However, at British and French instigation, 27 nations, including all the major European powers, signed a Non-Intervention pact, thereby agreeing not to intervene or take sides in the conflict.\textsuperscript{10} The United States extended its preexisting neutrality legislation to cover civil wars and placed a strict embargo on the sale and export of arms to Spain.\textsuperscript{11} Despite signing the agreement, Italy and Germany evaded compliance of the Non-Intervention pact and continued to supply Franco with arms, aircrafts, and military personnel, while Russia sold arms to the Republic, albeit in much smaller quantities. As a result, what was quickly recognized as a full-fledged civil war is now seen as one in which foreign involvement was absolutely critical. Beyond the official stance of neutrality adopted by the governments of most of the industrialized world, approximately 40,000 volunteers from fifty-two countries—including approximately 3,000 American men and women—rallied to the defense of the Spanish Republic by serving in the much-publicized columns of the International Brigades. For the Nationalists, over 70,000 uniformed Italian troops and aviators, roughly 20,000 German military specialists and several thousand Portuguese soldiers were sent by Mussolini, Hitler and Salazar, respectively, to fight in the ranks of Franco’s army.\textsuperscript{12}

On September 29, 1936, Franco was sworn in as head of government of the Spanish state and named \emph{Generalísimo} of the armies, while the Republican side rallied together individual militias to form the unified Popular Army in October. On November 7, the Nationalists initiated their offensive on Madrid, Spain’s capital. The Republicans’ defenses were briefly defeated at University City on November 15, but the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 806.
\textsuperscript{12} Judith Keene, \textit{Fighting for Franco} (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), vi.
ill-equipped capital held despite formidable aerial bombardment until the Nationalists moved north on November 23.

As the war progressed into 1937, the number of infantry fighting on the both Nationalist and Republican sides increased significantly and with time, the superiority of the Nationalists’ artillery and aviation factored more heavily into individual outcomes of the conflict. On April 26, 1937, German airplanes destroyed Guernica on General Franco’s request. The destruction of Guernica, subsequently immortalized in Pablo Picasso’s massive painting, stirred international outrage and “led to an intense journalistic and propagandistic war,” but it was still widely believed abroad that the Spanish Civil War could be “isolated” if left alone by international powers.\(^\text{13}\) Three weeks later Valencia and Bilbao were bombed. In May, fighting broke out in Barcelona between the communists and anarchists within the antifascist camp, causing further fracturing among the Popular Front. Crucial legitimacy for Franco came on August 28 when the Vatican recognized Franco’s regime, mirroring the actions of Hitler and Mussolini the previous November, and thereby institutionalizing Catholic support for the fascist cause.

During the second half of 1937, offensives of intense fighting converged around Madrid, the capture of which would presumably end the war. Republicans suffered heavy casualties at Brunete, just west of Madrid, during the heated month-long battle in July 1937 and suffered a worse fate during the fighting in Aragón from August well into October.

At the beginning of 1938, the Republicans waged an offensive on the Nationalist-held Teruel, first conquering the town in what Life described as the “greatest

Republican victory of the war” only to have the Nationalists recover it by February 22. The second half of the war, from March 1938 to its formal conclusion on April 1, 1939, saw an increase in battles where Republicans faced Nationalist mechanized forces on foot, in addition to more instances of aerial bombardment. The Republicans launched the ultimately unsuccessful Battle of the Ebro in late July 1938, which lasted into November and was undermined by the Franco-British appeasement of Hitler in Munich. By mid-October 1938, all of Northern Spain was in Nationalist control. The Nationalists conquered Catalonia during the first two months of 1939, and on February 27, the governments of France and the United Kingdom recognized Franco’s regime. On March 28, Madrid finally fell to the Nationalists and on April 1, Franco declared the war over in a national radio broadcast. Franco’s subsequent dictatorship lasted nearly four decades, until his death in 1975. By the end of the war, over 600,000 human beings had lost their lives, making it the most devastating war in Spanish history.

In the United States, support for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War was common among left-wing intellectuals, writers, and artists. For many liberally inclined Americans, the Spanish Republic became “a beacon and a symbol: it galvanized the democratic and revolutionary hopes of international opinion.” Indeed, in much of the industrialized world, the Spanish Civil War was initially seen as a battleground where democracy could potentially triumph once and for all over fascism, thereby undermining the threats posed by the aggressive international movements initiated by Hitler and Mussolini.

16 A list of prominent American supporters of the Republic invariably includes John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn, Jay Allen, Archibald MacLeish, and Waldo Frank.
The significance of the Spanish Civil War as a major event in Spanish and European history is both well known and well documented. It produced thousands of books, articles, novels, films, plays, and works of art, many of which occupy positions of significant cultural visibility: Picasso’s *Guernica*, Capa’s *Falling Soldier*, Arthur Koestler’s *Spanish Testament*, George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, André Malraux’s *L’Espoir*, and Max Aub’s *The Magical Labyrinth*. The list is far from exhaustive, and fails to reflect the voluminous historiography of the war, which, according to historian Paul Preston, consists of “over fifteen thousand books, a literary epitaph which puts it on par with the Second World War.”

Retroactively, the war is viewed as a prelude to the larger ideological conflicts between fascism, communism, and democracy that erupted on an unprecedented scale in Second World War. The Spanish Civil War also is viewed as an early testing ground for new techniques and technologies of twentieth century warfare—most notably the saturated bombardment of civilian targets. However, most pertinent to this study is the Spanish Civil War’s position as a significant turning point in the rise of photojournalism in mass-produced print media.

All aspects of the Spanish Civil War were photographed. Given the large-scale production and distribution of the newly founded American picture magazines of the mid-1930s, the images published in these magazines met a sizable audience. Although there were a good deal of talented photographers who covered the Spanish Civil War—most notably Robert Capa, who subsequently “became the yardstick by which later war photographers, and photojournalists in general, have been measured”—this study is

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19 See Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*.
does not focus on the work of a single individual, but rather the images chosen and reproduced in two American picture magazines: *Life* and *Photo-History.*

Elevated quickly to a position of cultural prestige, the picture magazine provided access to images at a time when no other news outlet regularly illustrated stories with photographs, profoundly changing the ways and extent to which the average American could visualize the world around them.
Chapter 1. 
Picturing the News

“Look, the photographs say, this is what it’s like. This is what war does. And that, that is what is does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins.”

- Susan Sontag21

To the contemporary viewer, the images of the Spanish Civil War do not appear exceptional upon first glance. A given photograph might be particularly well composed, and another might capture a distinct moment frozen in time, but save for variations in skin color, the photographs depict war in a way that is familiar to the contemporary eye. The images show armed conflict and they show the people and places affected by the war behind the smoke of its frontlines. They show the hollowed out buildings and collapsed streets after bombings, and the piles of corpses before relocation to mass graves. The images are close-ups of soldiers both in action and at rest, large panoramic views of the landscapes of war shot under the high-noon sun and in the dark of night, and full sequences of individual campaigns and attacks spanning both time and distance. They’re shot in black and white, a distinction that easily differentiates them from images of more recent wars and situates them historically as documents of a past war whose immediacy has long since expired.

However, the images of the Spanish Civil War are incredibly unique, if mainly by virtue of extenuating historical circumstances that prove difficult or impossible to capture within the frame of a photograph. First, advances in photomechanical technology allowed photographers to capture all facets of warfare and with a degree of

intimacy that had never before been possible. Second, through modern communication systems, photographs were widely disseminated to audiences in Spain and abroad. And lastly, the images convey the realities of a war that represented a monumental battle—as the precursor to the ideological battles and tactics of modern warfare that would play a definitive role in World War II, and as a high-stakes civil war where ordinary civilians and trained soldiers alike took up arms to fight for what they believed to be the right direction for the future of Spain.

In order to fully understand the significance of the images of the Spanish Civil War, one must address the standards and limitations formed by the tradition of photographic war coverage that preceded the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, as well as analyze the routes by which the images were presented to the masses. To view the images of the Spanish Civil War as their American audience viewed them, but with greater historical hindsight, is to examine the very foundations of the modern viewing of war.

I. The photograph invades the media

The introduction of press photography to print media was a phenomenon—if a slow and gradual one—of immense importance. As Gisèle Freund pointed out, “Before the first press pictures, the ordinary man could visualize only those events that took place near him, on his street or in his village. [...] As the reader’s outlook expanded, the world began to shrink.”

The last decades of the nineteenth century mark the beginning of a new era. Developments in science, industry, transportation, communications, and the expansion

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of global trading systems changed the some of the most fundamental ways in which the world worked. The United States transitioned from an agrarian to an industrial economy, making conditions ripe for magazines with large, national circulations. Factories, growing larger and more numerous, began to produce for the national and regional markets that soon eclipsed their local counterparts. The introduction of the electric motor and the expansion of the existing network of railroads led to the rapid development of industry. An international monetary system was established with the adoption of the gold standard in the 1870s. Retail commerce was vertically integrated with the formation of large department stores in the United States around 1870,23 and between 1870 and 1900, the population of the United States approximately doubled.24 Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859; Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876. The invention of the halftone printing process in 1880, subsequently compared to the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, enabled the reproduction of photographs in newspapers and magazines. When observed together the changes are stunning:

The average manufacturing plant, in the sixty years from 1850 to 1910, increased its capital more than thirty-nine times, its number of wage earners nearly seven times, and the value of its output more than nineteen times. The consolidations which resulted in the Sherman Anti-trust Act of 1890 continued to increase after 1896. And as manufacturing grew, so did the channels for taking mass-produced goods to the consumer. During the 1800’ s, railroads laid some 70,000 miles of track; and […] mileage continued to mount by about 5,000 miles a year as the century turned. Communication with the farmer was facilitated by the growth in the number of rural free delivery routes—from forty-four in 1897 to 4,000 in 1900 to 25,000 in 1903.25

Indeed, a group of academics from the University of Illinois and Stanford went so far as to proclaim the impact of these changes “so great that a man of George Washington’s time probably would have been more at home in the Holy Land in the days of Jesus Christ than in America in 1900.”\textsuperscript{26} Admittedly hyperbolic, the statement alludes to relatively common post-World War II attitudes concerning the dramatic changes incurred by the industrialization of American industry and culture throughout the preceding century.

Advances in photomechanical technology fostered the growth of the illustrated press during the same period and the effects of wider access to photographs became manifest in the emerging modern culture. Although news photography had tentatively been in practice as early as the 1840s,\textsuperscript{27} it was not until the halftone process was first used in the 1880s that newspapers and magazines illustrated with photographs became feasible for a mass audience. From the earliest days of the medium, photographs and hand-drawn copies of photographs had adorned the pages of books, magazines, and newspapers, but several factors make the period between 1880 and 1936 significant. First, the explosive growth of illustrated journalism at the turn of the twentieth century helped to popularize the news and made the printed photograph an indispensable part of the final product, just as urban populations grew larger and a consumer middle-class began to emerge. Second, spurred by developments in camera and printing technology, photographic coverage of news events became more sophisticated and far more effective. News became an industry in and of itself with photography spurring its commoditization.

\textsuperscript{26} Jenson, et al, \textit{The Mass Media and Modern Society}, 34.
\textsuperscript{27} For early examples of photographs circulated for their depiction of news events, see Carl Ferdinand Stelzner, “Ruins around the Alster after the great fire of Hamburg,” 1842; see also, George N. Barnard, “Fire at the Ames Mills, Oswego, New York, July 5, 1853.”
The industrial advances that took place in the 1890s—the development of high-speed rotary printing presses, the halftone and rotogravure processes, and much improved papers and inks—made the mass-produced American picture magazine feasible. Before then, magazines and newspapers had relied on wood engravings, which were made by tracing a photograph, transferring the tracing to the end-grain of a hardwood block, and then meticulously cutting away by hand all of the areas between the myriad fine lines. The process of cutting the wood was so time and labor intensive that the block for a large reproduction was often sawed into parts, each to be cut by a different person and then reassembled for printing. For wood engravings, the continuous-tone image of a photograph was translated into a composition of discrete lines. The halftone, seen as “the most important development of the time,” was executed by translating the photographic image into a pattern of dots on a negative, which was then transferred to a metal plate, and the human eye then recomposes the hundreds of small dots of varying sizes into areas of darker and lighter grays—the half tones—which make up the image as a whole.28 Furthermore, the halftone process facilitated the simultaneous printing of images and text on the same page, which significantly sped up the printing process.

Photographs began to appear in newspapers just as the modern newspaper industry was taking shape, while the general public’s regular exposure to the “news” was quickly becoming a cornerstone of democratic society in the United States. The population grew increasingly literate. With the help of Lewis Hine’s photographs, shot for the National Child Labor Committee to provide “photographic proof” of children working in deplorable conditions that no anonymous or signed details” could refute,

child labor laws were established. While some critics at the turn of the twentieth century argued that the photograph compromised the intellectual and journalistic standard of print media, it undeniably succeeded in making previously bourgeois media forms more accessible to a larger and more diverse readership. Indeed, until print media finally accommodated “the visual as text and language in addition to illustration, there were serious discussions among intellectuals about the demise of literature in all of its forms.” As Susan Sontag wrote, “In contrast to a written account, which, depending on its complexity of thought, references, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership, a photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all.”

The first photograph to be mechanically reproduced appeared in 1880 in the New York Daily Graphic, but at that time both magazines and newspapers still relied heavily on illustrations and drawings. It was not until 1904 that Britain’s Daily Mirror became the world’s first newspaper to be illustrated exclusively in photographs, and only in 1919 in the United States did New York’s Illustrated Daily News follow suit. Within a few years, the Daily News was the most widely read paper in New York and others like it appeared on newsstands in cities across the country. Although photography should not be credited exclusively with inciting the massive growth of media outlets at the turn

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33 Freund, Photography & Society, 104.
of the century, the incorporation of images into the news helped to catalyze the modern upgrading of media communications.

During the interwar period beginning after World War I, photography was not only enriched by expanded roles in journalism, advertising, and publicity, but it was also nourished by acceptance within avant-garde movements in the graphic arts.\(^{35}\) Imaginative experimentation with techniques and new visions of potential subject matter situated photography as an artistic medium with broad aesthetic and intellectual horizons.

During the 1930s, photography became the dominant form of visual media in the United States, not just within the imagery of reform—as it had been employed most prominently at the turn of the century—but within the visual culture as a whole. Its usefulness within an astonishing variety of social discourses—from police files to press photographs to movie stills—continued to spread.\(^{36}\) The camera, with its realistic and reproducible image, rose to become the “central instrument of the age,” as James Agee wrote in the 1930s, just as the photograph quickly became the central symbol of modern communication.\(^{37}\) In this new form of visual communication, picture magazines would come to play a critical role by serving as the primary sources of the new “language” of photography and by providing the contextual framework through which images were accessed and interpreted by the public.


II. Picture magazines in the modern age

In both Europe and the United States, the picture magazine was made possible by the new technological advances and supported by the great demand of the general public for visual representation of people, places and events.

Although newspapers and illustrated weekly magazines began using photographs on a more regular basis around 1900, it was only decades later that the picture magazine in the United States evolved into something resembling its modern form, a process first initiated by developments in the German media in the early 1920s and enabled by significant technical advances in print and photomechanical reproduction in the 1920s and 30s.

In the late 1920s there were more illustrated magazines in Germany than anywhere else in the world, and by 1930 their combined circulation reached five million copies per week and was estimated to reach at least twenty million readers.\(^{38}\) Indeed, by the late 1920s, “every major city and many political organizations [in Germany] would have their own illustrated magazine.”\(^{39}\) However, perhaps more significant than the ubiquity of these magazines was the novel way in which images and text were integrated into a new form of communication, which came to be known as photojournalism.\(^{40}\) The leaders in this new movement were the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (“Berlin Illustrated Newspaper” or *BIZ*), founded in 1890 and published by the prominent Berlin publishing firm, the House of Ullstein; the *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* (“Munich Illustrated Press”), founded in 1923 in a conscious imitation of *BIZ* and published by the south German publisher Knoff & Hirth; and *AIZ*, or *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (“Workers’ Illustrated

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\(^{39}\) John Fout, “The *Berliner Illustrierte* and Photojournalism in Germany, 1929-1935”, *Picture Magazines before Life*, (Woodstock, N.Y.: 1982), [unpaginated].  
\(^{40}\) Newhall, *The History of Photography*, 130.
Newspaper”), a communist-sponsored magazine founded in 1924 which opposed the view of bourgeois mass-media publications.41

The culturally prominent position of these magazines gave rise to a new breed of photographer. Early press photographers generally had little formal education and were trained merely as technicians of the camera. With the camera’s obtrusive machinery and smoky, nauseating magnesium flash powder, they were socially situated somewhere between a simple employee and a skilled worker.42 The new photographers came to photography from other art mediums or from highly trained professions whose profitability had dwindled with the crumbling of the German economy in the wake of World War I. Some of the notable photographers involved at the time include Alfred Eisenstaedt, Tim N. Gidal (né Ignaz Gidalewitsch), Georg Gidal, André Kertész, László Moholy-Nagy, Felix H. Man (né Hans Baumann), Martin Munkacsi, Willi Ruge, Umbo (né Otto Umbehrs) and Dr. Erich Salomon.

German picture magazines, led primarily by BIZ and its longstanding editor-in-chief Kurt Korff, gradually began to shift to more dynamic layouts in which text was subsidiary to images—a move indebted to the proliferation of German expressionist cinema at the time—although the emphasis generally remained on the photograph as an illustration of the text.43 By the late 1920s, cinema had developed beyond the vaudeville stage and was beginning to attract sizable audiences to theatres on a regular basis. In the German picture magazine, photographs taken for journalistic purposes appeared alongside assemblages of photographs and graphics (typically lifted from other sources), which came to be known as photomontages and served to some degree as a tool for

“clarifying social and political issues for a working-class audience.” Photomontages appeared in BIZ, but John Heartfield’s powerfully political photomontages for AIZ, which “called on Germans to fight militarism,” represented the radical extreme of work produced by artist-designers anywhere. Within general layout, the overlapping, cropping, outlining, and otherwise shaping of photographs was relatively common to both newspapers and magazines across Germany.

Even the photographic essay, which would become the mainstay of American picture magazine editorial and layout, was formalized in the German picture magazine. According to Freund, Stefan Lorant, serving as the editor-in-chief of the Münchner Illustrierte Presse, is credited as first conceiving of the photographic essay after taking his post in 1930, where a series of images were paired and arranged to depict one central subject or event. The sequence of images was to have a beginning and an end and “was defined by place, time, and action, just as in the classical theatre.” In practice, the photo essay was perceived as novel—a dynamic new way to portray a news event that might otherwise fall flat in words alone—but in fact had a much more extensive history to be found in the early human instinct to visually represent and therefore preserve narratives. As Tim N. Gidal observed, “Modern photoreportage is the contemporary form of the pictorial report, which employs the technical means of its time to accomplish the age-old task of visual communication.”

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44 Rosenblum, A World History of Photography, 470.
45 See Umbo, “Vote First,” Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung, September 1930 (No. 37), 1618-1619.
47 Smith, Making the Modern, 189.
48 For more Lorant, see Michael Hallett, Stefan Lorant: Godfather of Photojournalism (Latham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006).
49 Freund, Photography & Society, 124.
As the 1920s progressed, photographic images became increasingly familiar to the public. An array of visual media began to saturate the market, accompanying new methods of photographic distribution and contextualization including the newsreel, the ubiquity of amateur photography and increasingly innovative forms of cinema. As a result, audiences were growing increasingly familiar with visual forms of the news, which were quickly beginning to shape its vision.\(^{51}\) Indeed, as Irme Schaber wrote concerning the visual medium of the Western press in the mid-1930s, “The photograph was the fulcrum of modern news reporting. It generated impulses and changed the accustomed modes of visual perception for millions of readers.”\(^{52}\)

New camera technology also permitted new forms of photography. By the mid-1920s, the most popular camera among photojournalists was the small-plate Ermanox camera, which had been released by the Ernemann firm of Dresden in 1924. By 1926 it was manufactured by the Zeiss Ikon Corporation, and for the most part had replaced its bulky predecessor, the medium-format, folding-bellows model that produced large 4 x 5 or 5 x 7-inch negatives, which had the benefit of not usually necessitating an enlarger for print reproductions but the critical disadvantage of its size and heftiness. With the Ermanox, each plate measured 1¾ by 2¼-inches and came in its own plateholder; between shots, the exposed plate had to be replaced by a fresh one and given their size and fragility, the photographer could rarely carry more than twenty-five or thirty plates, which forced him or her to consider each shot carefully so as not to waste any plates. The Ermanox was fitted with focal plane shutters with speeds up to 1/1000 of a second, but its greatest asset was its lens, which at first had a maximum aperture of \(f/2\) and was

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soon improved to \( f/1.5 \).\footnote{Newhall, The History of Photography, 219.} Thus, the Ermanox allowed images to be made in exceptionally low lighting—an especially important feature given that unobtrusive flashbulbs didn’t become readily available until 1931; the Ermanox opened the way to relaxed indoor portraiture and to candid interior photography.\footnote{Whelan, This Is War! Robert Capa at Work, 15.} However, indoor exposure times still hovered around \( \frac{1}{4} \) to \( \frac{1}{2} \) of a second, precluding sharp handheld exposures and thus requiring the photographer to use (and travel with) a tripod.

However, early in the 1930s, leading photographers began to realize the great possibilities made feasible by the more compact 35mm Leica,\footnote{Early fans of the Leica included Aleksandr Rodchenko, André Kértész, Walker Evans, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, Dr. Paul Wolff, and Robert Frank. Later adherents included William Klein, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and Sebastião Salgado. See Anthony Lane, "Candid Camera: The Cult of Leica," New Yorker, September 24, 2007.} the “new camera that radically changed photojournalism.”\footnote{Freund, Photography & Society, 127.} Indeed, most of the photographers who began with the Ermanox were already switching to the Leica by 1931, when the Ermanox went out of production (Zeiss Ikon would begin manufacturing the Contax, designed to compete directly with the Leica, in 1932).\footnote{Marianne Fulton, Eyes of the Time: Photojournalism in America (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 125.} The Leica, originally crafted by German optical engineer Oskar Barnack, was the first to popularize the 24mm by 35mm negative—a 2:3 ratio—adapted from cine film, but it was released in 1925 to a lukewarm appraisal by professional photographers. The camera itself was small—for many years, the Leica would most readily be classified as a “miniature camera”—and to some critics “it looked like a toy designed for a lady’s handbag.”\footnote{Lane, "Candid Camera: The Cult of Leica," 167.} It was, at first, seen as a camera for amateurs—a middle-upper-class luxury good—by the new generation of professional photographers who sought to legitimize the photographer’s profession and craft.
Although reminiscent of the “amusing detective playthings of earlier times,” the Leica allowed the photographer to operate unobtrusively—shooting images in near silence and enabling the photographer to appear practically indistinguishable from the ordinary bystander by virtue of the camera’s size and modesty. The shutter speeds on the first Leicas were as fast as one five-hundredth of a second and the aperture as wide as f/3.5. They were soon manufactured to make the lens removable and interchangeable with an array of lenses of varying focal lengths and apertures. Easy to handle, with a fast lens and rapid film advancement mechanism in which film was advanced in less than a second per frame and the possibility of accidental double exposures was precluded, the Leica called forth intuitive rather than considered responses of its subjects and permitted its users to make split-second decisions about exposure and framing, which often imbued the image with a powerful sense of being a “slice-of-life excised from a seamless reality.” Indeed, it was with the Leica that “the lens became an extension and adjunct of the eye.”

In capturing images of war, the Leica allowed for new possibilities in combat photojournalism, which came to represent the height of photographic realism. The small, lightweight camera allowed the photographer to appear virtually indistinguishable from the combat soldier or ordinary citizen, and many photographers capitalized on this ambiguity to move freely in a variety of different environments. Photographers no longer had to carry around bulky equipment or set up tripods to capture publishable and uniformly sharp images, and could therefore explore possibilities in shooting images that belayed the movement and emotion of war.

60 Ibid., 465.
Production figures illustrate how rapidly the Leica took over the camera market. In 1927, the Ernst Leitz Company produced 1,000 Leicas; 10,000 in 1928; 50,000 in 1931 and 100,000 in 1933.62 The second edition of the Leica was released in 1932 and featured a range finder.63 The slightly larger twin-lens Rolleiflex had come on the market in 1930 and as the thirties progressed, an increased emphasis on naturalism in photoreportage emerged. The “candid portrait” gained popularity among audiences of both newspapers and magazines. In contrast, images whose subjects appeared posed or whose compositional framing seemed overly thought-out were increasingly viewed with a sense of skepticism. Naomi Rosenblum interpreted this aesthetic and stylistic shift as the product of technological changes in the medium:

Owing to the ease with which exposures were made, the small size of the negative, and the pressures of publication deadlines, 35mm film was often developed and printed in professional laboratories, with either the photographer or—more likely—the picture editor selecting and cropping the images for reproduction. The freedom from processing, along with the possibility of representing movement, of capturing both the evanescent expression and the sometimes surreal-looking juxtapositions of unlikely elements in the visual field, soon appealed to photographers interested in personal expression as well as those engaged in photojournalistic reportage. As a consequence, a new ideological stance concerning camerawork emerged during the 1930s and grew stronger in subsequent decades.64

The emphasis on pre-visualized, uniformly sharp, finely printed images in the wake of the photographic pictorialist movement gave way to a new approach to photography that made room for the image as an aspect of the journalistic enterprise and as a two-dimensional document of a pre-existing reality. Furthermore, the flashbulb, invented in

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63 *New Yorker* film critic Anthony Lane wrote in 2007, “I used a [Leica II] just the other day—a mid-thirties model, although production lasted until 1948. Everything still ran sweetly, including the knurled knob with which you wind on from frame to frame, and the simplicity of the design made the Leica an infinitely more friendly proposition, for the novice, than one of the digital monsters from Nikon and Canon. Those need an instruction manual only slightly smaller than the Old Testament, whereas the Leica II sat in my palms like a puppy, begging to be taken out on the streets.” See Lane, "Candid Camera: The Cult of Leica."
Germany in 1929 and introduced to the American audience a year later by General Electric, allowed for considerable new possibilities in artificial-light photography. More natural images taken indoors or at night finally became tenable.

However, the great early period of European photojournalism collapsed abruptly in 1933 with the disintegration of the Weimar Republic. Hitler came to power as Chancellor and effectively appropriated the German media under his regime’s fascist totalitarian agenda, where images and text were increasingly integrated and deployed in the form of propaganda—as tools used in the systematic dissemination of information in a biased or misleading way with the intention of promoting a political cause or point of view.65 The entire German press was muzzled and many influential photographers and editors fled the country, including Alfred Eisenstaedt and Fritz Goro, who were hired by Henry Luce to work for Life. Both Kurt Korff and Stefan Lorant left Germany as soon as possible for America and England,66 respectively, and soon, “all the creators of modern photojournalism in Germany spread their ideas abroad, exerting a decisive influence on the illustrated press in France, England, and the United States.”67 A mere three years later, a new picture magazine appeared in America that would become “the most celebrated of its kind throughout the world.”68

66 Kurt Korff first fled to Austria and then to the United States, where he served as a consultant (with Kurt Szafranski, who had served as editor-in-chief of BIZ and its sister publication, the monthly Die Dame) for Henry Luce in devising a working editorial and aesthetic formula for Life. Korff was hired as a “special consultant at $2,600 a year, with his presence quite literally kept secret from most of the [Time Inc.] staff” (Wainwright, The Great American Magazine, 15-6). In England, Stefan Lorant went on to found the Illustrated Weekly and the enormously successful picture magazine, Picture Post. Lorant would maintain that Luce derived many of his most important ideas for Life from the Illustrated Weekly.
67 Freund, Photography & Society, 133.
68 Ibid., 141.
III. The picture magazine in the United States

Illustrated newspapers served as a precursor for picture magazines, beginning with *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* in 1851, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Weekly* in 1855, and *Harper’s Weekly* two years later. These newspapers, along with *Century* and *Scribner’s*, were generally intended not for the great mass of the population, but for “gentlefolk of means.” In 1896, the *New York Times* began publishing a weekly photographic supplement, and other large-circulation newspapers followed suit. In 1914, the *New York Times* refashioned its supplement as a more comprehensive weekly illustrated news digest, the *Mid-Week Pictorial*, which it billed as a “pictorial war extra.” Its layout was initially a haphazard visual compendium of war photographs from Europe, occasionally interspersed with more extensive narrative and picture stories, but the digest itself proceeded to experiment with a variety of word and picture combinations. A month after World War I ended, in the December 26, 1918 issue, its editors assured readers that the *Mid-Week Pictorial* would “continue to present the official, authentic, documented photographs of all phases of the great war on land, on sea, and in the air, and the world rebuilding to follow.” However, peace brought with it a slow, steady decline in *Mid-Week Pictorial*’s circulation and although it continued as a rotogravure weekly with thirty-two pages of regular news pictures, public interest steadily

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69 Frank Leslie is credited as stating, in 1859, “The painter’s easel is almost abolished, except as a handmaiden to photography whose actions and deeds fill the world [and] are brought before the eye with characteristic expression.” Quoted in Carlebach, *The Origins of Photojournalism in America*, 63-4.

70 As written by Frederick Lewis Allen in the January 1937 edition of *Scribner’s*, *Scribner’s* content represented a particular ideal—that is, “the ideal of the educated man, the philosopher, who is at home not merely in his own land and his own age, but in all lands and all ages; from whose point of perspective the Babylonian seal-workers are as interesting as the Pittsburgh steelworkers; who lives not merely in the world of food and drink and shelter and business and politics and everyday commonplace, but in the timeless world of ideas.” *Scribner’s*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (January 1937), 20-21.


72 Fulton, *Eyes of the Time: Photojournalism in America*, 64.

died off. Owner Monte Bourjaily shut down operations in February 1937 when it became increasingly clear that efforts to find a larger audience for *Mid-Week Pictorial*, a publication that fell awkwardly between a picture magazine and an illustrated newspaper, would be fruitless in competition with *Life*.

*Mid-Week Pictorial*, *Panorama*, and *Parade* all pre-dated *Life*, but none had *Life*’s popular success and none presented photographs as veritable historical documents in the same vein or to the same degree as *Life*. As Wilson Hicks, a self-described “Picture Consultant” and executive picture editor for *Life* from 1937 to 1952, stated concerning status of photojournalism in print media,

> *Life*, more than any other publication, confers on the photograph an importance as a journalistic medium at least as great as that of the word, and gives to the editors, writers and photographers an opportunity unequaled in the world press to work creatively with what is, next to words, the medium most used by man to communicate facts and ideas.

Certainly, *Life*’s staff believed firmly in the power of the photograph to teach and inform the reader, but they often presented the images generated for the magazine with too strong an air of infallibility—either in failing to acknowledge the role of the photographer in subjectively choosing a certain subject, angle, or shot, or, otherwise in obscuring the role of the editor and art director in constructing the photographic narratives found in *Life*’s pages. *Life* was willing to distinguish images taken by non-staff photographers as “publicity photos” or doctored, most obviously in the case of the composograph but also in reprinting images that other news outlets had printed but had

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edited to make either more or less shocking. By reprinting images in \textit{Life} that had been released to provide or imbue the public with specific and calculated impressions, \textit{Life} not only informed their readership of the connotative power of the photograph, but also distanced its own images from the constructions manifest in other uses of photography.

Furthermore, as Karen Pomeroy and Steven Heller stressed, \textit{Life} “quickly became the eyes and conscience of its quickly expanding readership,” and, as many Americans would acknowledge, “Few magazines captured the world through such a powerful lens. No other picture magazine—certainly neither \textit{Look} nor \textit{Collier’s}—could guide (or mold) the average American’s perceptions of the world, nation, and neighborhood.”

However, no one on \textit{Life}’s staff would deny that \textit{Life} was greatly influenced by the style of photojournalism that been realized in the German illustrated magazines of the early thirties, and which had also spawned the French picture magazine \textit{Vu} (“Seen”), founded in 1928. Its founder, Lucien Vogel, who was originally trained as an architect but who had worked on various arts and fashion magazines, regarded the magazine itself as a progressive tool, describing \textit{Vu} as “at once a form of expression and a means of action.”

With the popular success of \textit{Life} already established by the spring of 1937, a whole slew of American picture magazines cropped up on newsstands across the

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77 For example, in an installment of ‘Speaking of Pictures,’ \textit{Life} printed two images side by side: the first, labeled “the trunk murder,” shows a man peering into a personal luggage trunk where a tied and bound body is partially visible; the second, labeled “the expurgated trunk murder,” shows the same man (apparently Arthur Fellig posing) peering into the trunk where the corpse has been “painted out.” The caption of the second image notes that the “expurgated trunk murder” image was printed by the New York Post, “which feared that the corpse would upset its readers,” but noted that “other papers” printed the image with the corpse in full view. “Speaking of Pictures… A New York Free Lance Photographs the News,” \textit{Life}, Vol. 2, No. 15, April 12, 1937, 8-11.
\end{flushright}
One such magazine was Photo-History, an ambitious project that planned to explore one current events subject per issue, almost exclusively in photographs. Photo-History represents the acute end of experimentation in visual representation in American picture magazines of the 1930s. John R. Whiting wrote nearly ten years after its debut that “[…] despite such ideas as Photo-History, the picture magazine boom settled down to Life, Look, and Parade, plus a handful of small cheesecake papers and the constantly changing Pic.”

The first edition of Photo-History appeared in March 1937 with the title “WAR IN SPAIN” emblazoned in a bright red circle on its cover, and will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Although images were presented in picture magazines largely with an air of indisputable authenticity, the discursiveness of the written word finds no equivalent in the reproduced image. Stuart Hall sought to define the nature of press photography while indicating how the photograph’s transparency to the real allows the ideological to pervade the visual. In claiming the authority of the eyewitness account, the photograph then obscures the degree of selectivity on the behalf of both photographer and editor that defines and situates the most successful photographs. Hall wrote:

Of course the choice of this moment or event against that, of this person rather than that, of this angle rather than any other, indeed the selection of this photographed incident to represent a whole complex chain of events and meanings is a highly ideological procedure. But by appearing literally to reproduce the event as it really happened, news photographs repress their selective/interpretative/ideological function. They seek a warrant in that ever-pre-given neutral structure, which is beyond question, beyond interpretation: the ‘real’ world.

Thus, while the primary objective of news photography remains descriptive, the interpretive function pervades the photographer’s inherently subjective selection process.

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in choosing, framing, and shooting a given photograph and contributes to the editor’s process of cropping, captioning, and positioning. However, while recognizing the validity of Hall’s analysis, it is necessary to point out that the “ideological function” of the news photograph is itself subservient to and determined by a broader web of culturally specific beliefs upon which ideology must draw in order to take effect, whether by undermining or reaffirming those preconceptions. Furthermore, in the case of periodicals with large staffs who generally collaborate to produce any single editorial, the combined efforts of the photographer and editors might very well serve to obscure any one agenda.

A meaningful indicator of ideology can be found in what a specific culture deems newsworthy. As Susan Sontag noted, “War was and still is the most irresistible—and picturesque—news.” Indeed, from a historical perspective, the early development of American photojournalism is inexorably linked with war, while providing access to images of war significantly advanced the growth of modern print media in the twentieth century. And as it turned out, news and images of war were of great interest to the general public at the dawn of the age of the American picture magazine.

The first ten years of Life coincided with the series of conflicts in Africa, Asia, and Europe that ultimately culminated in the Second World War. Not surprisingly, between 1936 and 1945 images of strife in Abyssinia, China, France, Italy, Spain, the

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82 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 49.
83 Marianne Fulton, Eyes of the Time: Photojournalism in America, 33.
84 In a 1931 sociological study entitled “What People Want to Read About” conducted by Douglas Waples and Ralph W. Tyler, the “most important fact to emerge” noted that the “interest in reading about such significant social issues as ‘personal hygiene,’ ‘the next war,’ ‘the courts and the administration of justice,’ and the like, is nearly universal among adult members of all classes of society.” Despite the nationwide interest in reading about “matters of real importance,” Time reported in 1939 that out of the 3,072 counties in the United States, 897 of them did not have libraries (roughly 29%), and nearly thirty-two million Americans did not have access to bookstores. Douglas Waples and Ralph W. Tyler, What People Want to Read About: A Study of Group Interests and A Survey of Problems in Adult Reading (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), and “Cheap Books,” Time, Vol. XXXIV, No. 2, July 10, 1939.
Soviet Union, and Pacific Islands “filled the pages of the magazine,” and according to Rosenblum, “for the first time, worldwide audiences were provided a front-row seat to observe global conflicts.”

IV. War photography: a visual lexicon of death and destruction

The first formal photographic coverage of war was undertaken by Roger Fenton, an Englishman who came to photography from the legal profession. Fenton’s coverage of the Crimean War came at the instigation of the British government by Prince Albert and was intended to counteract the increasingly negative and alarming printed accounts of the war published in newspapers across England. The Times, the authoritative London daily newspaper, waged attacks on the incompetence of the British military leadership and took note of the horrendous number of deaths and injuries from causes other than combat. Fenton arrived in the Crimea in the winter of 1855 for a four-month long tour, “having contracted to publish his photographs (in the form of engravings) in a less venerable and less critical weekly paper, The Illustrated London News, exhibit them in a gallery, and market them as a book upon his return home.”

However, Fenton’s worked turned out to be a commercial failure. The three hundred negatives “sold at auction when the public evinced little curiosity in the war.”

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87 There had been other intermittent coverage of war prior to Fenton’s (for example, the Mexican War of 1846-8, the Second Sikh War in the Punjab in 1848-9, the Second Burma War of 1852), but Fenton’s coverage was the first to be commissioned and executed formally just as the coverage of the American Civil War was the first to attempt to cover a war from beginning to end.
88 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 49.
Along with an assistant, Fenton took with him several horses and a wagon, which he had purchased from a wine vendor and fashioned into a darkroom to process the wet-collodion negatives he shot. Each plate required a separate chemical preparation in the darkroom, which then had to be exposed before the wet-collodion emulsion on the plate dried—a relatively quick process in the heat of summer. The exposures took from three to twenty seconds and had to be processed immediately. In addition to having been instructed by the British War Office not to photograph the dead, maimed, or ill, Fenton had to pose his stationary subjects sitting or standing in daylight conditions and have them stand still for the length of the exposure.\footnote{Newhall, The History of Photography, 85-7.} Although some of the views Fenton shot were taken at significant personal risk, it’s not readily apparent from any of his images. On the contrary, the images show well-groomed officers eating and resting or common soldiers tending to the cannons—photographically representing the war as a “tableaux of military life behind the front lines,” while depicting it as if it were “a dignified all-male group outing.”\footnote{Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 50.}

The first full-scale attempt to document war was carried out during the American Civil War (1861-65) by Mathew Brady, who received the necessary authorization from Abraham Lincoln, whom Brady had photographed several years earlier.\footnote{For more on Mathew Brady, see James D. Horan, Mathew Brady: Historian with a Camera (New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1955). See also Matthew B. Brady, The Civil War through the Camera (New York: McKinlay, Stone and Mackenzie, 1912), and the ten-volume Photographic History of the Civil War, published in 1911.} Although granted permission by Lincoln himself to accompany Union troops on their campaigns, Brady was not commissioned to cover the war in the same sense Fenton had been. As Susan Sontag explained, Brady’s “status evolved in a more American fashion, with nominal government sponsorship giving way to the force of entrepreneurial and
Brady’s staff, including Alexander Gardner, Timothy H. O’Sullivan, and George N. Barnard and some seventeen others, “photographed every phase of war their technique could encompass: battlefields, ruins, officers, men, artillery, corpses, ships, railroads.” They also show towns in war’s way and, most famously, dead Union and Confederate soldiers lying on the ground of Gettysburg and Antietam. Sontag wrote of Brady’s images,

The first justification for the brutally legible pictures of dead soldiers, which clearly violated a taboo, was the simple duty to record. “The camera is the eye of history,” Brady is supposed to have said. And history, invoked as truth beyond appeal, was allied with the rising prestige of a certain idea of subjects needing further attention known as realism [...]. In the same realism, one was permitted—required—to show unpleasant, hard facts. 

Brady considered himself a historian and was aware of his role in recording the events of history, but he also believed that the value of photographs increases with the size of their audience. As a result, nearly all photographs of the American Civil War were made by collodion process, and printed on albumen paper from plate-glass negatives with the intention to of being reproduced on a larger scale for the public.

However, the general public had limited interest in the generally stilted images of the American Civil War and as a result, they were not widely distributed. In 1862, the

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93 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 52.
94 Newhall, The History of Photography, 89.
95 Susan Sontag wrote of the arresting strength of these images: “The photographs taken by Gardner and O’Sullivan still shock because they Union and Confederate soldiers lie on their backs, with the faces of some clearly visible. American soldiers fallen on the battlefield were not shown again in a major publication for many wars, not, indeed, until the taboo-shattering picture by George Strock that Life published in September 1943—it had initially been withheld by the military censors—of three soldiers killed on the beach during a landing in New Guinea.” Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 70.
96 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 52-3.
98 As Griffin wrote, “Following the [American Civil] war, when Brady, as well as Gardner, Barnard, and other photo entrepreneurs, found disappointingly little commercial interest in their collections, the War Department bought a set of six thousand plates that Brady was auctioning to cover unpaid warehouse fees. […] The public as a whole did not pay much attention to the Civil War photographs at the time.” Michael
London Times expressed the frustration encountered by war photographers, noting “The photographer who follows in the wake of modern armies must be content with conditions of repose and with the still life which remains when the fighting is over.”

In general, professional photographers in 1860 were likely to own and use several cameras: one for portraits (produced as a tintype or carte-de-visite), a stereo camera for news pictures and scenics (printed as stereographs), and a third for large-format views (most likely printed on a single glass plate). As a result of the technical limitations of the photographer’s tools, many images of the American Civil War were staged; in many cases, both landscapes and scenes of figures were composed or rearranged by the photographer, allowing the photographer to establish a basis for “regularized compositional forms” in the images. Furthermore, the pairing of the images with captions and interpretive texts guided and created a “picturesque unity” of associations for the viewer. Indeed, it was only the significant upgrade of professional equipment in the 1920s that allowed war photographers to rely less heavily on staged photographs and fully abandon the long panorama shot for the tight action close-up.

Coverage of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the Spanish-American War (1898), the First Boer War (1899-1902), the Second Boer War, the Russo-Japanese

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100 Carlebach, The Origins of Photojournalism in America, 63.

101 Timothy Sweet, Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 137.

102 Ibid., 137.

103 Burnham, "Shooting Wars," 32.

104 Hermann Ullstein, one of the five brothers who ran the House of Ullstein publishing company, credited two factors in most prominently contributing to the journalistic revolution in Germany: the Boer War and the Kodak camera. Ullstein wrote, “Very shortly after the beginning of the new century, while the Boer War was still raging in South Africa, the German people began to take an interest in the outside world, finding themselves fascinated.” Hermann Ullstein, The Rise and Fall of the House of Ullstein (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1943), 84.
War of 1905 and the Mexican Revolution in 1914 better established the role (and perhaps necessity) of photography in the documentation of armed conflict. Especially with the Mexican revolution, there was a huge market for images of the principal actors in the conflict. Given Mexico’s proximity to the United States and the relative lack of official censorship of American reporters early on (in addition to the willingness of the revolution’s participants to accommodate the American press), compelling images found their way into newspapers and magazines alike. However, strict censorship became an unpleasant fact of life almost immediately after Francisco (Pancho) Villa’s surprise attack on Columbus, New Mexico on March 9, 1916. President Woodrow Wilson’s decision to pursue Villa with American troops led by General John J. Pershing meant that the press would then be controlled and monitored by American military forces. It was during this time that the U.S. Army honed its policies regarding photography and the press—safely before its formal entry into World War I on April 6, 1917. Not coincidentally, it was also at this time that the United States Army Signal Corps became an increasingly important producer of images. The images produced by civilian photographers were subject to approval by a military censor and if granted, were stamped with an official permission to publish. The army even went so far as to establish its own school in San Antonio for training still and motion-picture photographers, many of whom would serve as photographers in the First World War.

106 Ibid., 81.
107 The U.S. Signal Corps was founded in 1860, during the throes of the Civil War, and was authorized as a separate branch of the Army by an act of Congress in March 1863. Its mission statement, as it stands now, is to “provide and manage communications and information systems support for the command and control of combined arms forces.” United States Signal Corps, <http://www.banchoriontation.com/signal/mission.html>.
World War I (1914-1918) marked the beginning of modern warfare on a new and unprecedented scale. However, by and large, the images the public viewed during the war conveyed none of this. Jorge Lewinski wrote, “The toll of dead and wounded can be scored in millions: Russia seven, Germany six, France five and a half, the British Empire three; in all nine million died.”\(^\text{109}\) Despite death tolls numbering in the millions, Lewinski noted a disjunction in the horrible reality of the war and the visual representations of it: “The public saw very few pictures of the war, only those of the most innocuous kind.”\(^\text{110}\) Censorship was rampant. As Michael L. Carlebach observed, Official governmental and military antipathy toward the press during wartime was global by the first decade of the twentieth century. The consensus among rulers around the world was that a free flow of information and criticism invariably compromised military success. Reporters and photographers were tightly corralled, their words and pictures pored over, shaped, and reshaped by ever-vigilant and suspicious censors.\(^\text{111}\) Photographs of war were almost universally recognized as powerful and persuasive tools that could decisively affect and influence the opinions of the masses. As warfare progressively increased in scale over the course of the twentieth century, the terms prescribed by public opinion became more important in determining attitudes toward the sacrifices of life and freedom asked of both soldiers and ordinary citizens. Seasoned war photographers were struck by the far-reaching and unprecedented control of the press exercised by the military. James H. Hare, better known as Jimmy, was one of the biggest names in war photography by the start of World War I. Having covered practically every armed conflict across the globe since the Spanish-American War in Cuba (including the Russo-Japanese War, which was largely seen as setting the precedent for General Douglas MacArthur’s stringent World War I policies concerning

\(^{109}\) Lewinski, *The Camera at War*, 63.  
\(^{110}\) Ibid.  
\(^{111}\) Carlebach, *American Photojournalism Comes of Age*, 79.
the press), Hare was primed for anything. However, Hare covered the First World War for *Leslie’s Weekly* after his longtime employer *Collier’s* refused to send him on account of his age (fifty-two), but found red tape everywhere he looked with his lens. Richard Whelan wrote:

Hare was unprepared for the extremely rigid censorship that he encountered in Britain and France. Having just arrived in London, he snapped some pictures of departing recruits at Paddington Station and was promptly arrested for photographing without a permit. He then learned that every occasion on which he wished to photograph would require a permit issued specifically for that place and time. [...] “Photographs seem to be the one thing that the War Office is really afraid of,” he wrote in June 1915.112

In fact, World War I was extensively photographed, but mostly by enlisted military photographers and nearly all films were shot, processed, and censored or released by their respective armed forces.113 At the insistence of military commanders, independent journalists were kept far behind the frontlines, and thus had to be content with information (and at times, disinformation) supplied by the army and whatever feature stories and pictures they could glean from non-combat areas. Carlebach stated:

In this century no conflict was more rigidly censored than the First World War. All sides restricted the press; the activities of the Allies were no more open to public scrutiny than those of the Central Powers. The consensus among the warring parties was that press coverage is more harmful than helpful, and so, from the outset, much of the global bloodletting occurred outside the view of the public. [...] Official euphemism and outright prevarication characterized much of the material presented to the public during the Great War.114

Thus, most images released to the American public during the war were aimed at drumming up popular support for the war. Since the public’s veneration of

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113 Although the countries involved in World War I generally attempted to enforce an official monopoly on war photography, some soldiers traveled with small, lightweight cameras like the Kodak (introduced in 1888). For the most part, the use of private cameras was forbidden, but photographs of World War I taken by soldiers began to surface after the armistice, finding their war into family albums and personal collections alike. One such album, *Georges Salles pendant la Première Guerre mondiale*, is in the photography collection at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. See Joëlle Bolloch, *War Photography* (Paris: Musée d’Orsay, 2004).

114 Carlebach, *American Photojournalism Comes of Age*, 82.
photographic truth hadn’t noticeably diminished since the age of the daguerreotype, images presented in print media were generally accepted as honest and complete representations of the European theatre of war. In the United States, the relentless censorship was justified in a number of ways. First, it was thought that the unrestricted dissemination of information could endanger the lives of military personnel in action by giving the enemy access to information concerning “the strength and location and intended movements of our own troops”, according to MacArthur, who had become the official censor for the War Department in Washington, D.C. Furthermore, American military officials were “unwilling to assume responsibility for the transportation, care, feeding, and protection of journalists, some of whom were probably critical of the armed forces anyway.”

The control of the press was further institutionalized on April 14, 1917 by President Wilson’s executive order establishing the Committee on Public Information (CPI), which was to function as a filter for information pertaining to the war as well as a vast governmental public relations agency. One of the functions of the CPI was to control the production and dissemination of still photographs by military and civilian photographers. Although there was some degree of public outcry concerning the infringement of freedom of speech, the government ultimately ceded nothing. Photographers who complained about the restrictions while on assignment abroad found themselves blacklisted, and not invited on future army-led envoys into largely sanitized battle zones.

115 Ibid., 84.
116 Ibid.
117 For coverage of the legislation and the reaction of the general public, see “Oppose Censorship as Now Proposed,” New York Times, April 21, 1917.
It was only after the war had ended that the American public began to see uncensored images of the First World War. The sizable losses by all nations involved helped contribute to a general distaste for war, which served as incentive to establish the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which formally renounced war as a tool of diplomacy in 1928. Indeed, the United States pointedly avoided engaging in war again until entering World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

In addition to images of war, American audiences of the 1930s were increasingly confronted with visual representations of all aspects of domestic and international news—from newsreels and documentary films to press photography and spot-news photographs, covering both breaking news and the quotidian and all else in between. Photographic representation of news events was quickly becoming an indispensable part of conveying the news to an American audience. Americans living in small cities and towns found alternatives to the local daily newspaper in nationally circulated newspapers and magazines. In making news a commodity, conditions ripened for free market competition in the media and as some would argue, prompted the conveyance of news as spectacle in order to increase sales.

Thus, in the mid-1930s, conditions converged that allowed the picture magazine to emerge as the primary vehicle for conveying the news visually to an American audience: advances in printing technology allowed images to be reproduced relatively

118 The Kellogg-Briand Pact, named for the U.S. secretary of state and the French foreign minister, was signed by fifteen countries on August 27, 1928. It solemnly renounced the use of war to resolve conflicts or achieve political goals. In addition to the United States, every major European power was counted in the initial group, which later expanded to sixty-three signatories.
119 Newsreels and their predecessors—news films and travelogues—played an important role in the visual representation of news events during the 1930s, but are beyond the scope of this paper. For a comprehensive history of the newsreel as a medium of motion picture journalism, see Raymond Fielding, The American Newsreel: A Complete History, 1911-1967, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006).
120 For an account of the documentary film genre as it was seen in the 1930s, see Paul Rotha, Documentary Film (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1936).
cheaply and quickly alongside text; cameras and films came on the market that made previously untenable situations feasible for photographic representation; and the popular success of newsreels and illustrated newspapers and tabloids indicated the American audience’s eager receptiveness to visual representation of the news. In addition, the financial viability and mass appeal of picture magazines had already been tried and proven in Europe. The timing was right for the American picture magazine.

By the time the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, the age-old tradition of visually documenting war—previously in paintings, drawings, and etchings—had found an incredibly powerful ally or potential enemy in the camera. Almost a century after photography’s debut in 1839, the photographic documentation of war had not only become the standard, but, in the United States and elsewhere, it was institutionalized within the armed forces. The Spanish Civil War took place when, for the first time in history, photographs could be shot, developed, reproduced, and distributed to large audiences economically and with relative ease. *Life* magazine, the most popular and far-reaching publication of its kind, reaped the benefits of the 1930s convergence of “new technologies – new cameras, film stock, means of mechanical reproduction, presses, papers, inks; new techniques – of graphics, layout, presentation and reportage; new styles of publication and exhibition; and new methods of finance, promotion and distribution.”

Chapter 2.
Photographic Coverage of the Spanish Civil War in *Life* Magazine, 1936-1939

The first edition of *Life* magazine appeared on American newsstands almost exactly four months into the Spanish Civil War, which Caroline Brothers described as “the first war to be extensively and freely covered for a mass audience, and [the war that] marks the establishment of modern war photography as we know it.”

The complete coverage of the Spanish Civil War in *Life* spans the first three years of the magazine’s production. Close examination reveals the broader context of the discourse that surrounds the images of war: the developing aesthetic strategies *Life* used in choosing and formatting images, headlines, captions, text and story layout to communicate editorial messages about politics, the respective roles of men and women, and the burgeoning progress of American culture and capital. Much of *Life*’s coverage reduced the complexities of the Spanish Civil War to abide by the representational strategies that shaped the multivocal events, issues, and social conditions of the war into the forebears of *Life*’s almost formulaic cultural discourse.

To some Americans, the Spanish Civil War was of critical importance. It represented the first substantial fight between modern democracy and fascism, served as a “rehearsal” for the ideological and military battles that would be waged in the impending World War, and provided a battleground where ideology and conviction met direct action. To others, there were more pressing concerns in other realms or places,

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and given the varied nature of *Life*, neither the Spanish Civil War nor any single subject covered could take decisive credit for the magazine’s success.

Regardless, the editors of *Life* struggled early on to provide fair and balanced coverage of the war. Initially, they would take one of three approaches in the magazine’s coverage: print text and images that gently supported the Republican cause; use text and images together to depict each faction’s perspective and then forcefully pit one side of the conflict against the other; or undermine the war by pairing comical or incongruous images that trivialized the severity of the war with headlines, text, or captions that contradicted the images by verbalizing horror and suffering. However, by January 1938, *Life* adopted a more solemn approach towards war that fostered war photography as its own representative genre and encouraged viewers to approach images of war as components of their own category of imaging.

I. *Life*’s Story

Since its inaugural issue dated November 23, 1936 emblazoned with a photograph by Margaret Bourke-White of the Fort Peck Dam, *Life* magazine has come to occupy a unique position in the development of the American identity. Founded in the middle of a decade that began with the Great Depression and ended in World War II, *Life* became a popular source—if not the most popular source—of news and culture during the interwar years. Large-circulation periodicals reflected the American people’s apprehension toward the domestic and international conflicts that fissured the late interwar years, while exploring the American perspective on the social tensions and brewing storm of clashing ideologies across the industrialized world. With the help of *Life*, the average American citizen began to see themselves less as an individual
connected only to the local communities they could immediately visualize, but as a single acting agent within a much larger system of human existence.

The founding of *Life* in 1936 completed Time Inc.’s print media triumvirate initiated by *Time* (launched in 1923) and *Fortune* (launched in 1930). Time Inc. co-founder Henry Robinson Luce\(^{123}\) had a unique vision in mind for *Life*. *Life*’s mission, as written in Luce’s prospectus, was:

> To see life; to see the world; to eyewitness great events; to watch the faces of the poor and the gestures of the proud; to see strange things—machines, armies, multitudes, shadows in the jungle and on the moon; to see man’s work—his paintings, towers, and discoveries; to see things thousands of miles away, things hidden behind walls and within rooms, things dangerous to come to; the women that men love and many children; to see and to take pleasure in seeing; to see and be amazed; to see and be instructed.

Thus to see, and to be shown, is now the will and new expectancy of half mankind.\(^{124}\)

Luce’s proposal for the new weekly picture magazine set high expectations for both its breadth and reach. Not only did *Life* propose to ensure widespread pictorial exposure to “great events” and enigmatic “strange things,” but it also took an unabashedly instructive approach to the act of viewing such images. Furthermore, the emphasis on actually “seeing” as opposed to just looking positioned the reader in a locus of empowerment.\(^{125}\)

To “see” was equated with the acquisition of knowledge where, as Wendy Kozol argued, “‘Seeing’ becomes not a mirror [to the reader] but a way of framing differences and

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\(^{123}\) Henry Luce (1898-1967) was in born in China, the son of an American Presbyterian minister. According to Gisèle Freund, Luce’s “puritanical, Calvinist education, the austerity of his upbringing, and his later studies at Yale all combined to make him a staunch conservative. […] He became one of America’s press lords, a transformation in the purest tradition of liberal American society during the first third of the century.” Luce founded Time Inc. with his longtime friend Britton Hadden, who died suddenly in 1929 at the age of thirty-one. At the time of Luce’s death at age 69, he owned four magazines, a book publisher, five radio stations, six television stations, paper factories, forests, and oil wells. Freund, *Photography & Society*, 143,146.


The cinematic—pans, zooms, close-ups, and cutaways—is also incipient in the movement of the proposal's phrasing. By establishing a connection between the magazine's didacticism and its interest in entertaining as a function of visual representation, *Life* thereby began forging an “apotheosis of the visualized as enlightenment,” privileging vision in a way that would come to characterize much of Western civilization.

Luce's prospectus also listed practical specifications concerning size, quality of paper, and contents for the execution of the new magazine. In describing *Life*’s contents, the prospectus specified:

A bigger and better collection of current news photographs than is available in all current event magazines plus all the Sunday [newspaper] gravure supplements combined. Altogether about 200 photographs [per issue] with full explanatory captions.

As a general interest magazine, *Life*’s all encompassing editorial policy was thus conceived to make its competition obsolete by providing a “bigger and better” compilation of news photographs than its existing competitors, like *Mid-Week Pictorial*, could offer. By the recommendation of former BIZ editor Kurt Korff, the style of images printed in *Life* would adhere to a realist aesthetic, “a visual strategy with a long tradition of credibility as a truthful depiction of the social world.”

Although first conceived during the later years of the pictorialist movement in the early 1900s, straight photography was perhaps best embodied by the photographic society “Group //64” founded in 1932, whose charter members included Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, John Paul Edwards, Sonya Noskowiak, Henry Swift, Willard Van Dyke, and Edward Weston. According to Newhall, the group...
progressive conception that form should follow function, but in regard to photography, the minimally mediated representation of subjects had a history as old as the medium itself. However, the images printed in *Life*, especially those shot by staff photographers for explicit use in the magazine, were undoubtedly informed by the “documentary” photography practiced by FSA photographers and characterized by the humanistic and anthropological rhetoric that situated documentary as a photographic approach rather than a technique. Although not as objective as the term “documentary” might imply, much like the news photograph, “documentary photography traded on the status of the official document as proof.”

Luce further proposed to “edit pictures into a coherent story—to make an effective mosaic out of the fragmentary documents which such pictures, past and present, are.” Moreover, Luce imagined his pictorial project in grandiose terms, as written in his personal notes for the prospectus: “A hundred years from now the historian should be able to rely largely on our Picture Magazine instead of having to fumble through dozens of newspapers and magazines.”

Fashioning *Life* as a repository for the photograph as a historical document—if only a “fragmentary” one—was thus built into its very foundations. Nevertheless, Luce’s vision, as articulated in the prospectus, did not consider that while the photographic document is indeed historically specific, its meaning is closely linked to the conditions of its production and use.

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formulated an aesthetic that in retrospect appears “dogmatic” in its specifications: “any photograph not sharply focused in every detail, not printed by contact on glossy black-and-white paper, not mounted on a white card, and betraying any handiwork or avoidance of reality in choice of subject was ‘impure.’”


133 Ibid., 244.


In order to accomplish the ideals set forth in the prospectus, *Life*’s editors proposed to replace the “haphazard” taking and publishing of pictures with the “mind-guided camera,” and to “harness the main stream of optical consciousness of our time.”

The magazine’s layout would be simple and engaging without being offensive—a loose grid noted for varied and “often unattractive” typography.

While claiming to respond to new contemporary demands for pictorial illustration, *Life*’s editors tended to view pictures, and the “new language” of photography, in relatively one-dimensional terms. Although compelling, images were viewed as simple and unproblematic didactic tools whose seemingly straightforward communicability might, as Richard Bolton wrote, “serve democracy, helping to construct a modernist *polis* by providing a means of speech accessible to a wide number of participants.”

However, *Life*’s early claims concerning the mimetic reality of the photograph failed to recognize that photographs are better understood as complex objects in which multiple readings are possible. In terms of the photograph, factors including lighting, composition, framing, and choice of subject matter serve to construct viewer perceptions of the “reality” depicted while the discourse surrounding the image—placement, interaction with other images or advertisements, captions, and accompanying text—combine to construct meaning.

As Carol Squiers stated, “The way in which any magazine uses pictures determines how and what those images mean.”

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From the outset, *Life* aimed to be a mass-circulated, general interest magazine, with coverage of domestic and international news, sports, arts and culture, entertainment, medicine, and social life. As Gisèle Freund wrote,

Months of work had gone into deciding what would please the greatest number of readers throughout the United States, what would awaken their curiosity and touch on their emotional preoccupations and dreams of success. *Life* wanted to be understood by all, to be a magazine read by the entire family, and to popularize the sciences and arts.  

The staff structured its editorial content around two cornerstones: the “big news picture story” and the “big special feature.” These two photo essays played against one another, seeking to achieve an editorial balance in tone—if one tackled a serious issue, the other covered lighter subject matter, or if big news picture story applied more directly to a niche audience demographic, the big special feature would have more mass appeal. Additionally, a variety of other sections and departments were established to fully canvass the great potential for photographic subject matter. One of these sections was called the ‘Camera Overseas,’ a regular installment for the initial fifteen months of publication that combined images from foreign press and photo agencies with captions and short paragraphs on pertinent international news.

Intrigued by Luce’s proposal for *Life*, investors provided an estimated $3 million for start-up costs and continued to support the endeavor through even its financially devastating initial years. Indeed, despite its widespread popularity, Time Inc. failed to turn a profit on *Life* until the second business quarter of 1938—nineteen months into

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143 The ‘Camera Overseas’ stopped appearing in issues of *Life* by March 1938. It was tentatively replaced in July 1938 by the section entitled ‘LIFE on the Newsfronts of the World’, which fell under the indexical heading of ‘The Week’s Events’. While the ‘Camera Overseas’ had generally appeared in the last third of each edition, ‘LIFE on the Newsfronts of the World’ usually appeared in the first third, directly after the Index, and included a significantly greater amount of written coverage to accompany the images.
publication—at which point it sold more copies of *Life* on American newsstands than any other magazine and all other picture magazines combined.\footnote{48}{“Life Reports to its Readers with Sincere Thanks,” *Life*, Vol. 4, No. 11, March 11, 1938, 1.}

The first issue, made up of ninety-six pages with nearly a third devoted to advertisements, had an initial print-run of 466,000 copies with ad revenues set for 250,000 copies.\footnote{45}{Ad revenues set at 250,000 copies per issue probably reflected the 235,000 charter subscriptions (sold at $3.50 a year) already received by Time Inc. by the time the first issue was ready to go to press. This preemptively eager response was due largely to a letter sent to *Time* subscribers proffering the new magazine and bearing Luce’s signature—an adept marketing move suggested by Time Inc. circulation executive Pierrespont Isham Prentice. The letter read, in part, “We can promise you the biggest package of interesting and exciting pictures in the world—10,000 pictures a year, intelligently edited and intelligently captioned.” Nearly 38% of *Time*’s subscribers purchased subscriptions to *Life* before it even hit newsstands. Wainwright, *The Great American Magazine*, 62-4.} On newsstands November 19, 1936, the entire print-run of the first edition of *Life* sold out nationwide within 24 hours.\footnote{46}{Richard Whelan, *This Is War! Robert Capa at Work*, 48.} It became clear nearly overnight that there was a sizable and enthusiastic American audience for Henry Luce’s newest venture. News sellers couldn’t keep *Life* on the shelves, writing in to increase or even double their orders from week to week. In 1936, the largest circulation ever attained by any magazine in its first year of publication was 500,000, a figure *Life* surpassed in a matter of weeks; by January 4th, 1937, circulation had been increased to 650,000 and by the next week, to 675,000.\footnote{47}{Elson, *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise 1923-1941*, 297.} By March, the weekly print-run of *Life* had been upped to over a million and its readership was estimated to reach at least triple that number. By late 1937, an independent market research survey showed that taking into account the “pass-along”\footnote{48}{Pass-along rates refer to the number of people a magazine was passed along to in addition to the initial subscriber. A survey in the late 1930s indicated that fourteen people read each issue; in July 1938, another noted a pass-along rate of 17.3. Elson, *Time Inc.*, 342-43.} rate of the magazine made *Life* the most widely read picture magazine in the United States.\footnote{49}{Elson, *Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise 1923-1941*, 341-42.} Indeed, in November 1937, *Life* reported that “over 14,000,000 Americans turn to LIFE each week for the news of the week and the ways of the
And in contrast to many other popular magazines of the time, men and women read Life in almost equal numbers. Life served as the primary vehicle for conveying the news visually to a mass audience from nearly the time of its inception well into the post-war era.

In the beginning, Life’s printing firm, R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company of Chicago, could not physically produce enough copies to meet to demand under the limitations of their four high-speed rotary presses. Indeed, until the mid-thirties, it wasn’t possible to print photos on high quality coated paper at high speeds because the ink would smear, thus explaining why Life’s European predecessors were printed on newspaper stock. As William Stott explained, “Life was the result of a triple breakthrough in printing technology: the simultaneous development of faster drying inks, a ‘machine-coated’ paper that was thin and cheap, and the ‘heat set printing’ process,” which systematically placed gas-fired ovens along the printing press to scorch ink dry as it was applied to the page. Having only recently developed the fast-drying ink necessary to run Life’s large-format paper through presses earlier in 1936, increasing the print-run by tens of thousands from week to week proved a difficult and barely conceivable task.

In addition to manufacturing challenges, Time Inc. faced a serious financial dilemma in its publishing of Life since initial advertisers in the magazine had signed a contract that set rates for a significantly lower circulation than were immediately realized; to make matters worse, the contract had frozen the undervalued rate for the entire first year of publication—$1,500 for a full page, $2,250 for inside color, and the fourth cover

151 Kozol, Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism, 8.
153 Whelan, This Is War! Robert Capa at Work, 47-8.
in color for $3,000.\textsuperscript{154} As circulation greatly outran revenue and production costs remained relatively high, Time Inc. not only failed to turn a profit on \textit{Life} but lost nearly 10¢ per copy. Nevertheless, Time Inc. continued to increase \textit{Life}'s print-run, believing that better satisfying the popular demand would give greater dividends over time than the downfalls of its more immediate losses.\textsuperscript{155}

By the end of its first year of publication, Time Inc. had lost nearly $3 million on \textit{Life}. However, in terms of popular response and the history of print media, it was an unprecedented success. The public demand for \textit{Life} was so high that during its first year secondhand copies of \textit{Life} sold at the same ten-cent price as new copies.\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Life}, Luce remarked in 1937, “is what the public wants more than it has wanted any product of ink and paper.”\textsuperscript{157} By 1939, with a circulation of over two million and ad rates adjusted accordingly, \textit{Life} had become one of the most widely read magazines in America. Indeed, before television no other medium reached as many individuals as once, and for decades no magazine stamped the collective consciousness with as many indelible images.\textsuperscript{158}

\section*{II. \textit{Life} tackles war}

“Though we did not plan \textit{Life} as a war magazine,” Henry Luce later commented, “it turned out that way.”\textsuperscript{159} Although perhaps referring primarily to the widespread popular acclaim \textit{Life} received in its coverage of World War II by such talented

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Elson, \textit{Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise 1923-1941}, 281.
\item Wainwright, \textit{The Great American Picture Magazine}, 87.
\item Whiting, \textit{Photography Is a Language}, 28.
\item Heller, \textit{Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design}, 53.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
photographers as W. Eugene Smith, Heinrich Hoffman, Ralph Morse, David Douglas Duncan, Joe Rosenthal, or Carl Mydans, Luce’s statement alludes to a meaningful mission statement that he could finally embrace after relentlessly struggling early on in Life’s development to define its role and purpose as a mass-interest magazine. Indeed, World War II, considered the least controversial of modern wars following the full revelation of Nazi carnage as the war ended in 1945, provided an opportunity for photojournalism come of age. In turn, photojournalists gained a “new legitimacy, one that had little place for the left-wing dissidence that had informed much of the serious use of photographs in the interwar period.”

However, the importance of war news to Life had been suggested years earlier. In September 1935, Daniel Longwell, a member of the Time Inc. staff who worked closely alongside Luce in developing Life and who later served as its first managing editor, proposed bringing out a picture magazine on a crash basis. Commenting on the imminent Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Longwell argued “a war, any sort of war, is going to be natural promotion… If the Italians march into Ethiopia and if eight days later we can have a magazine on the stands, it ought to sell 100,000 [copies].” From the very first edition of Life, war was some of its best-selling news.

In Life’s self-published anthology, Life Platinum Anniversary Collection, 70 Years of Extraordinary Photography (2006), it is “deemed appropriate that the Spanish Civil War was the prevailing belligerency in the year that Life was born.” Referring to the “romantic” appeal of fighting for democracy, as well as the pronounced interest in the war on the part of American and European artists and intellectuals, the Spanish Civil War was

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160 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 34.
162 Andreas, ed., Life: Platinum Anniversary Collection, 70 Years of Extraordinary Photography, 110.
retrospectively seen as a war with “a heart,” leading the magazine’s editors to equate it with “an overarching raison d’être at Life—that [Life] is a publication with a heart.”

Contrary to the opinion expressed in 2006, examination of the coverage in Life reveals that the magazine never explicitly endorsed one side of the conflict or the other. Overall, the magazine expressed reluctant and understated support for the Republican cause apparent only by examining the full course of its coverage over time.

Initial coverage in Life did not give the Spanish Civil War a significant amount of editorial space nor did it place that coverage in prominent positions within the magazine. However, photographic coverage of the Spanish Civil War appeared consistently in Life’s pages from the very beginning. Of the six initial issues of Life published in 1936, the Spanish Civil War was represented in five of them by at least two images apiece. Of the first two editions where the Spanish Civil War is mentioned, the first represents only the Republican side of the conflict in images of people and events, while the second represents only the Nationalist side. Although the opposing side is alluded to in the captions accompanying both sets of images, each side is first visually presented as isolated from their counterpart.

In the inaugural November 23, 1936 edition of Life, news of the Spanish Civil War appeared on a page in the ‘Camera Overseas’ section. (Fig. 2) The five images that appear in Vol. 1, No. 1 depict the Republican faction and accompany a paragraph that reads:

Just as Madrid seemed ready to fall to the Spanish Rebels’ crack regulars and Moors, Government lines were reinforced by two grim columns Nov. 10. Called from the Guadarrama Mountain passes where they had stood off Rebels for four months, they were led by Generals Mangada and Galan, both trained Army officers. That day Madrid’s defenders threw back the Rebels for the first time.

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163 Ibid., 110.
General Galan left the front for a few hours to see his dying wife, killed by a Rebel air raid, then returned to his job.¹⁶⁴

The images depict the important military players mentioned in Madrid’s defense—candid portraits of Generals Mangada, Galan and Durruti—in addition to a photograph of an undated but well-attended Socialist-Communist rally in Barcelona and a distressed Señora García who, according to the caption, “raised a well-armed column of militiamen” in Barcelona. The images, credited in a separate column labeled ‘Life’s Pictures’ which appears towards the end of the issue, are attributed to “U.S. and foreign news agencies” without further specification. The first issue hit newsstands November 19th, which made the November 10th news of strategic developments in Spain a relatively quick turnaround for international news represented predominantly in images.

The caption and image of Señora Garcia illustrate *Life*’s normative guidance on the appropriate role of women in the public sphere. Señora García’s image, the largest one on the page, shows her standing erect in the foreground and in uniform with a “PS” armband (an abbreviation for Partido Socialista Obrera Español, the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party), holding a flagpole and looking across the camera’s lens and out of the frame. Four younger women stand some distance behind her, their heads angled slightly forward so that their eyes are somewhat obscured. The caption below reads, in part,

*Pictures of pretty girls in arms have given the Spanish Government its most successful propaganda. But in gruesome fact the trenches around Madrid have been piled high with the bodies of brave, if foolish, Spanish women killed in action.*¹⁶⁵

The older, tired and visibly worn, Señora García is certainly not meant to represent the “pretty girl propaganda,” but instead the ugly reality of Spanish women fighting and dying in combat—a contrast further heightened when viewed in relation to the only

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ⁱ⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.
other picture of a female that appears in that week’s ‘Camera Overseas,’ on the opposing page’s single-image spread of German-Dutch Prince Bernhard Zum Lippe-Biesterfeld and his bride-to-be Juliana listening comfortably to the radio at his family’s estate in German Silesia. The caption in Life presents a slight, but critical judgment against the “foolish,” but “brave” women killed in action while also emphasizing the newsworthiness of women fighting as soldiers in the war and even provides a preferable alternative in Prince Bernhard’s Juliana. No direct or combat warfare is depicted in these images, but there is an implied heroism and sacrifice on the Republican’s behalf in General Galan’s anecdotal leaving the front “for a few hours to see his dying wife,” which brings further attention to the active role of women in the war movement.

Although no images of Spain appear in the second issue, Life does make its first appeal to its readers regarding the power and validity of images taken with “miniature cameras”—the Leicas, Ermanoxes, and Rolleiflexes that had become the trademark of the most successful photojournalists and war photographers. (Fig. 3) In its first installment of ‘Speaking of Pictures,’ a “lightweight trifle” that would become one of Life’s most successful and long-lasting features,¹⁶⁶ Life printed an eleven image series of a brain surgery that Ernst Leitz Co., the optical firm that produced the Leica, exhibited across the country to demonstrate the quality of their product. The images illustrate the operation in step-by-step increments: beginning with a bird’s eye view of the patient’s scalp, the peeling back of the scalp, the drilling and opening of the skull and continuing to the dura matter being pulled back to expose the brain, and concluding with the stitching up of the patient’s skull, and the patient’s hair ultimately growing back again. The pictures are shot from a bird’s eye view and are jarring and graphic—shocking, to

say the least, and perhaps exercise in the capabilities of photographic sensationalism. As is written in the accompanying paragraphs:

LIFE’s editors still believe that this brain operation adds into a significant set of pictures _per se_. The patient’s skull was removed and replaced and the camera truthfully detailed each step of the process. Judged as an indisputable record of a disputable operation, these shots clearly indicate the point to which technical photography has progressed by 1936.167

The editors do not claim the images are artistic, but stress their role as an effective documentary tool; indeed, the description of the images as an “indisputable record” reflects the pervasive attitude of the time that positioned the photograph as the truthful visual representation of real world events captured and reproduced by mechanical processes. The paragraph continues, “That next year the camera in expert hands will go even further in bringing the laboratory into the layman’s living room, LIFE’s editors have no doubt.” The editors’ confidence in the professional photographer (with the “camera in expert hands”), and not the amateur, seems to reflect the magazine’s stance on recognizing the “credentials of objectivity”168 of the camera, while acknowledging that the photographer must possess an individual point of view and thereby insisting that the photographer be credentialed as a professional.

The third issue of _Life_, dated December 7, 1936, depicts the Nationalist—Rebel or Fascist—side of the conflict. (Fig. 4) In the ‘Camera Overseas,’ two images appear, one of which shows an armored vehicle stopped at an angle in front of a church with the words “¡Viva España!” printed in large white lettering on its side. The image is of the car stationary and unmanned, and would generally be of less appeal in content than its counterpart, which, according to the caption, shows a dead Nationalist soldier’s family, all dressed in black save for the “dead man’s child” in white who “waves at the

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167 _Life_, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 30, 1936, 3 (emphasis in original).
168 Sontag, _Regarding the Pain of Others_, 26.
“cameraman” as the family is informed of the deceased’s last words by his fellow soldier. However, the image of the car is made more significant by its caption, which reads, “This is a Rebel armored car in the Spanish Civil War, paid for by Italy and Germany. Heavily armored, it is of a different design from the first cumbersome, unstreamlined cars of the war.”\(^{169}\) Although unlikely that German and Italian funds would have been pooled to finance a single armored vehicle, what makes the caption meaningful is that it states, rather matter-of-factly but not explicitly, that both Germany and Italy had violated the terms of the Non-Intervention Pact, and were not only corroborating with one another, but also supporting General Franco’s Nationalist regime—a concise manifestation of Mussolini and Hitler’s Rome-Berlin Axis.\(^{170}\) With a single, unassuming image and concise text, any ambiguity is dispelled concerning whether or not foreign powers had intervened in the war.

In a small feature within the ‘Camera Overseas,’ the following two pages of the December 7 edition illustrate the headline “The Moors in Spain” in seven images. These pages suggest direct warfare more explicitly: armed men marching in single-file line through the woods, injured soldiers in sickbeds being tended to by a nurse, and hordes of uniformed men on horseback moving forward in loose formation.\(^{171}\) The caption beneath a half-page image offers an odd disclaimer:

Good pictures of the Spanish Civil War are rare. This is one of the best, showing the high, pine-wooded country north of Madrid, the dipping road alive with Moorish cavalry, officered by Spaniards. On Nov. 20, the Rebels’ General José Varela launched four squadrons of these men against Madrid. They were mowed down by machine-gun fire.\(^{171}\)


The implied deaths of the soldiers shown in the image—pictured here on the road “alive” with Moorish cavalry—provide the Republican side with a gruesome, but tangible victory.

The cumulative effect of the images and their captions leads the reader to believe that the Nationalist forces rely heavily upon morally questionable or monetarily bought infantry support, in addition to the materiel provided by Germany and Italy. An inlaid paragraph reads:

Just looking at a Moor makes a Spaniard’s flesh crawl. For years after the Moorish Riffi wiped out 10,000 Spaniards in 1921, many a Spaniard believed that the survivors were still held as slaves in the desert. But when Rebel General Franco started his rebellion last July in Spanish Morocco, he needed men. He offered the Moors 52¢ a day, a carbine and a chance to kill proletarian Spaniards.  

In describing the most recent attack of the “Moors” against the Spaniards, while omitting the many wrongs committed by the Spaniards against the Moors throughout their complex history, the paragraph partially absolves the Republican killing of the “Rebel Moors” not only as retribution for murdering Spaniards in 1921 but as obstructions to restoring democracy in Spain. The Moors, with an undeniably turbulent history in and with Spain, are pictured and presented in *Life* as Franco’s fighting muscle—willing to fight and die not out of political or ideological conviction, but as paid mercenaries.

Further critical of General Franco, the December 21, 1936 (Vol. 1, No. 5) issue covers the Nationalist bombing of Madrid with a two-page spread in the ‘Camera Overseas’ entitled “The Spanish Bomb Madrid.” *(Fig. 7)* The first image of the bombing is shot at night, showing fires on an unidentified street in Madrid. The image is grainy, due either to low-light conditions or to smoke, or both, and a number of vaguely

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172 Ibid., 61.
outlined figures appear in the image and are blurred but easily recognizable as people. Some are running away from the fire, which serves as the only source of light in the image, but others are moving in all different directions and with varying degrees of urgency. The fires, stemming from multiple locations within the image, are clearly uncontrolled at the time the image was made and there is no visible evidence within the frame indicating any effort to subdue them, producing an overwhelming feel of chaos and disorder. The image itself, capturing a turbulent moment—then reproduced in *Life* in its perpetual stillness—makes the viewer wonder if the fires were ever subdued. The caption beneath it states:

Worst mistake of the Spanish Civil War was Rebel General Franco’s decision to bomb Madrid to destruction, ‘district by district, no matter how much I regret it.’ This first major bombardment of a European capital notably failed to break the morale of the Loyalists inside the city, won many middle class citizens to the Government, shocked the rest of the world and destroyed wholly or in part Madrid’s thirty most important buildings and uncounted private homes.¹⁷³

Openly critical of the Nationalist bombardment of Madrid, the caption implies that the bombing not only failed to vanquish the Republican defense, but also backfired by rallying middle-class citizens to support to the Republican cause. Just beneath this shot are before and after images of the tomb of Spanish Cardinal Jimenes de Cisneros, located in the Madrid suburb of Alcalá de Henares. After the bombing the tomb is destroyed and laid open. This image is significant not only because it depicts the destruction of a tomb erected in reverence for the dead, but also because the Spanish Catholic Church had sided predominantly with the Nationalists, those responsible for its demolition.

Most affecting, however, are the paired half-page images on the opposite page.

*(Fig. 8)* The top image shows a Madrid street littered with heavy debris, the immediate

foreground of the image just barely showing where the street has collapsed inward—the darkest black of the image also serves as its focal point near the lower left corner, and seems to be a hole where the street has fully collapsed out of view. The street is deserted and two idle tanks stand where cars or people might have been. The caption begins with the top photograph, “One bomb pierced the street above the Madrid subway station where huddled…” and concludes beneath the lower photograph, “… Spaniards who thought the subway bombproof, were mortally mistaken.” The lower photograph shows at least thirty people seated on the quay, most of them looking directly at the camera, entire families—men, women and children of varying ages—seated closely together and leaning against one another. The image shows them tense and obviously alive, but the caption denies the reader a sense of hope for their survival. For the reader, the young and recognizable faces pictured here are now the faces of the dead—civilian casualties of the fascist enemy.

The December 28, 1936 edition of *Life* offers another two-page spread in the ‘Camera Overseas’ section featuring six images, five of which are credited to the young Robert Capa, who had already made his name as the preeminent photographer of the Spanish Civil War in Europe on assignments for the French picture magazine *Vu*. The images show University City, the bizarre battleground where Nationalist and Republican forces exchanged artillery fire on the outer edges of Madrid proper. *(Fig. 9)* A caption reads,

> On the outskirts of Madrid the advancing Spanish Rebels found in their path University City, the great scientific center their own deposed King Alfonso III had built on the proceeds of national lotteries. It promptly became a key fortress in the siege of Madrid. The Rebels took it, then lost it, won back part of it.174

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Built by the Nationalists’ “own” king from the revenue generated by the Spanish people by way of the national lottery, University City is presented as the communal and unique property of Spain. *Life* prints the “first War images of University City”: the view from the Republican holdout of the Nationalist-held medical center across the courtyard, volunteers of the “International Column, Frenchmen and German and Italian anti-Fascist exiles” bunking in a still-stocked chemistry laboratory, five Republican militiamen eating lunch in a classroom and using books as window barricades, the ecstatic response of a handful of *madrileños*—citizens of Madrid—upon seeing Government-manned airplanes flying above the city (the planes are alluded to in the caption, but remain unpictured). The images, some of which Capa would later include in his 1937 book of photographs from the Spanish Civil War *Death in the Making*\(^\text{175}\) are prime *Life* photographic material; they feature an extraordinary situation in a real-life setting, a stunning juxtaposition of the brutal and the academic, and a pictorial representation of a real-time event rich with possibilities in metaphor and allegory—at times, all within a single frame.

Following a break in the fighting during the harshest winter months early in 1937, coverage of the Spanish Civil War in *Life* became more sporadic. However, in the January 18, 1937 edition, two individually listed articles appear in the index covering the war in Spain. The first is headed “A munitions ship on its way to Spain outruns Congress and the Coast Guard” and describes Spanish Ambassador Fernando de los Ríos’s successful January 4\(^\text{th}\) attempt to send ambulances and airplanes from New York City to the “beleaguered [Spanish] Government” by taking advantage of a loophole he

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found in the U.S. Neutrality Act, which Congress was hurriedly rushing to amend.176

(Fig. 10) Although the story was not the biggest news event covered in the issue (“U.S. Labor Uses a Potent New Tactic—The Sit-Down Strike,” page 9) nor did it have the most mass appeal (“100 African Hippos Scared by Airplane,” page 46), it is well documented as a short photographic essay in a series of six photographs, the last two of which were probably considered novel in that they were shot aerially and show some tricky maritime maneuvering by U.S. Coast Guard ships.

The second story illustrates an interesting aesthetic opposition in a two-page spread by using the first page to cover the Republican side of the conflict and the second to cover the Nationalist side. (Fig. 11) This direct juxtaposition of differing perspectives seems to allude to a sense of journalistic objectivity, but the images connote a very different message in constructing a favorable message concerning the Republican cause while pairing images that support a mildly disparaging take on the Nationalists. The first page reads, “Loyal Spaniards defend Madrid” and features four photographs, two credited to Capa and two to Pictures Inc.177 The largest shows two men acting as a crutch for an injured man limping between them in the foreground of the image, as well as a group of two or three men further along the path, all walking in the same direction—away from the Republican defensive front at the Madrid municipal slaughterhouse, according to the caption. The image does not inherently suggest a direct proximity to Madrid, and although unpictured, the slaughterhouse is implied within the image by a path formed by hundreds of hoof-prints depressed into dried mud. The three accompanying images, smaller and arranged in a row such that the middle image


177 Pictures Inc.—also known as Pix and founded in mid-1936—was the New York photo agency ran by French expatriate Leon Daniel who served as Capa’s American agent until *Life* hired Capa to work on retainer in July 1943. Pix also represented the work of Alfred Eisenstaedt.
slightly overlaps the underlying two, show a man collapsing from his injuries incurred in
the defense of the slaughterhouse, a soldier reading a poster with the words of Stalin
printed on it under the heading “Las características del ejército rojo,” or “the characteristics of
the red army,” positioned together with a poster warning of gas attacks, and a crowd of
men and women standing in a room filled with pine-box caskets of the dead from
Nationalist air raids.

In contrast to the opposite page, the page covering the Nationalist side of the
conflict is united under the headline “Spanish Rebels have a smuggler and a
snapshotter.” Referring to the smuggler, a photograph of two women and a man on
horseback is attached to a caption that reads, “The scarlet pimpernel of the Spanish Civil
War was British Major Hugh B.C. Pollard (above, right), author of The Book of the Pistol,
who at the beginning of the Civil War flew to the Spanish Canary Islands and smuggled
out the Rebel General Franco, then in exile.” The “snapshotter” of the title refers to
the largest image on the page, of two men posing for a photographer—the snapshotter,
that is, making a play on the military register of photographic functions (to “shoot” a roll
of film, “aim” the camera’s lens, or “capture” an image)—in front of an artificial
backdrop as other uniformed soldiers look on. The image is anchored at the bottom of
the page above the caption:

In second-hand uniforms, Spanish Rebel recruits posed for their picture for a
street photographer in the Rebel camp. The nifty studio background folds up
and is carried under the arm. On Jan. 7, Rebel General Franco hurled these
recruits, led by German and Italian volunteers, in mass assaults against the
northern flanks of Madrid.178

The two men being photographed look smug posing—wearing matching tasseled
uniforms but different caps—one has a cigarette lit in his left hand and the edges of his

mouth curl slightly upward. Inexplicably present in the photograph is a little boy, no older than five or six, who stands squarely and stares not at the camera making the portrait, like everyone else in the frame, but instead at the photographer making the image the *Life* viewer sees. Thus, in the suspended temporal space manufactured in pages of *Life*, the Republican soldier helps his injured comrade away from battle, while the Nationalist soldier poses for token portraits while his compatriots look on, only mildly amused. The Republicans’ authentic backdrop pictures war only a short distance away—within range of gunfire—and stands in stark contrast to the Nationalist’s “nifty” studio backdrop that seems to highlight the superficiality of Franco’s army, their awareness of their position, and their use of images to connote a certain (perhaps falsified) reality.

In April of 1937, *Life* printed a statement that served to highlight the dual rhetoric of photojournalism. In something between a self-promoting advertisement and a clarifying statement of purpose, the April 26, 1937 edition of *Life* features a two-page spread recapitulating Alfred Eisenstaedt’s photo essay on Vassar College, which was originally published in *Life* on February 1. The twenty-four images are reproduced at a reduced scale and accompany a block of text that begins with the headline, “The Camera as Essayist,” and precedes a short statement that reads:

> When people think of the camera in journalism they think of it as a reporter—the best of reporters: the most accurate of reporters: the most convincing of reporters.

> Actually, as LIFE has learned in its first few months, the camera is not merely a reporter. It can also be a commentator. It can comment as it reports. It can interpret as it presents. It can picture the world as a seventeenth century essayist or a twentieth century columnist would picture it.
A photographer has his style as an essayist has his. He will select his subjects with equal individuality. He will present them with equal manner. The sum total of what he has to say will be equally his own.179

Here *Life* voices an interesting and critical opinion. The photojournalist is not only a reporter adherent to the honest and representational tenets of representational journalism, but he is also capable of actively commenting—or imposing his commentary—on the subject matter depicted in his images. While the persuasive power of the photograph is generally predicated on the perceived infallibility of its mechanical production—that is, as a referent to a pre-existing reality to which the photographer bears witness and then records by mechanical processes—*Life* allows for the perspective of the photographer to be represented in his or her own images. The connotative qualities of the image are thus related, however tentatively here in *Life*, to the photographer’s selection of viewpoint, lighting, distance, lens, depth of field, speed of film and type of camera. While serving as a mild and understated criticism of the perceived objectivity of images, *Life*’s statement to its readers functions primarily as a celebration of the ingenuity of creative expression realized in the “Photographic Essay.”

After a few more nods to the war in Spain in the ‘Camera Overseas’ section of the February, March, and April, installments of *Life*—with headlines like “Spanish Rebel Bombers Hit a Munitions Train” (February 15), “Rebel Spaniards Show Off to an Italian and a German” (March 29), “Spaniards Settle Down to Trench Warfare” (April 26)—news broke in mid-May of the Nationalist bombardment of Bilbao on May 11, 1937. *Life* covered the bombing in the May 31 issue, printing three images under the auspices of being the “first bombardment pictures to reach the U.S.”180 *Life*’s article on Bilbao not only underlines the intensifying war tactics and their effects on the civilian

population, but also illustrates *Life*’s integrative use of editorial content and advertising. To be sure, advertising was an important aspect of production for *Life*, just as it was for essentially all successful low-price, large-circulation magazines. Advertising had become a significant source of revenue for periodicals, and as industry expanded and a national readership for magazines became feasible, so did a national consumer base. *Life* reached a large, predominantly middle-class audience every week and advertisers selling cars, appliances, cameras, foodstuffs, clothing, and beauty products were quick to place ads in *Life*’s pages. *Life* enlisted more than three hundred advertisers before publication of the first issue and by 1963, it led all American magazines in advertising sales with over $143 million in gross revenues for advertisements alone.\(^{181}\) However, during *Life*’s first years, it was not yet clear what role advertising would play in relation to *Life*’s editorial style.

The May 31 Bilbao article represents one of the magazine’s most egregious juxtapositions of editorial content and advertisements.

There are four advertisements interspersed in the two-page article. The article headline reads, “First Pictures of the Bombardment of Bilbao,” and is framed by two photographs: one of approximately twenty men rolling drums of gasoline away from the depot as black smoke billows just out of the frame, and another of six women, one carrying bed linens, coming and going hastily from their homes or apartments. (Fig. 12) The images indicate danger that exists just outside of the frame: in the top image, men roll barrels away from the source of the black smoke (the gasoline depot, according to the caption), while the bottom image shows two women looking nervously off into the distance as another woman breaks into a run in the opposite direction. The images share page-space with a column advertisement for Carter’s Ink, “Finest for Fountain Pens,”

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\(^{181}\) Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, 244.
which features three closely cropped images of small bottles of ink and a tagline that reads: “Carter Makes a ‘Grand Slam’ in ink.” The two-page article is interrupted by a full-page advertisement for an electric shaver featuring a large image of a naked, curly-haired infant, lit dramatically from the side and showing the child’s buttocks partially exposed. Beneath the image, written in bold, capital letters is: “Just an idea of how smooth your face feels after using a Packard Lektro-Shaver.”\(^{182}\) The page is distinguished as an ad only by the word “Advertisement” printed in the top right corner while its use of image, text, and layout aesthetically situate it within the ken of *Life*’s editorial content. The Packard Lektro-Shaver ad is an incisive example of the intentional blurring between ads and editorial content that sought to turn the product advertised into a type of “visual news” that gained legitimacy by visual association.\(^{183}\)

The last part of the Bilbao article is printed on the next page with an image of a young boy in tears, looking directly at the camera while being guided off a boat by a bespectacled man smiling broadly. (Fig. 13) The headline reads, “This little Basque boy, now safe in France, is still mortally terrified by what he went through in the Spanish Civil War.” In contrast to the caption, the image has a comic quality to it. The viewer is implored to pity the child while perceiving his visible anguish as fleeting—almost as if the child’s misery were caused by his skinning a knee or some other equally temporary or trivial ailment. As if reinforcing the transience of the boy’s position, his image appears in between two narrow columns of advertisements—one for nail polish (“Make your hands look as soft and tender as the spring by tipping them, like buds, with these new shades.”), and the other for a new design of men’s swimming trunks called “The Snugger.” The comical image of the “mortally terrified” boy is further degraded by its

\(^{183}\) Kozol, *Life’s America*, 46.
direct juxtaposition with two advertisements indicative of leisure time and disposable income.

*Life*'s coverage of the bombardment of the Basque Provinces—a region that includes Bilbao, Guernica, Santander, and Gijón—in April and May of 1937 focused solely on the bombing of Bilbao and trivialized the thousands of children seeking refuge abroad. Carol Squiers commented on *Life*'s concentration on individuals caught in the web of circumstance as opposed to the larger picture by deducing that in the process of “provoking empathy for the single innocent player, *Life* promoted rugged individualism as a substitute for real understanding of historical occurrences.”

During the early weeks of *Life*'s first summer, its editorials managed to trivialize the worsening situation in Spain’s Civil War. Despite continued fighting on the Jarama front just south of Madrid, for all of June the Spanish Civil War warranted no coverage at all. Then, on July 12, 1937, *Life* published what would endure as the most famous war photograph of all time—Robert Capa’s *Falling Soldier*—with the headline “Death in Spain: The Civil War has taken 500,000 lives in one year.” (Fig. 14) The image is large, occupying the better part of the first page of editorial content—the most prized position for content in the whole magazine. With Robert Capa’s photograph, the Spanish Civil War was elevated to *Life*'s “big news picture story” of the week, a position it would occupy only twice during the entire from 1936 to 1939.

The text accompanying the photograph reads:

On July 17 the Spanish Civil War will be one year old. In that time is has brought Death to 500,000 Spaniards, has shattered such ancient cities as Madrid, Toledo, Bilbao, Irun and Durango, has kept Europe in a state of jitters.

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185 The image was first published in the French *Vu* on September 23, 1936, for whom Capa was working at the time, and later in 1938 in England’s *Picture Post* along with the proclamation that Capa was “The Greatest War Photographer in the World.”
When the war started, most U.S. citizens looked on the Republicans as a half-crazy, irresponsible, murderous scum that had turned on its honorable betters. A year of war has taught the U.S. more of Spain.

The ruling classes of Spain were probably the world’s worst bosses—irresponsible, arrogant, vain, ignorant, shiftless and incompetent. Some 20,000 landlords owned 50% of the land. They did not give their field hands modern machinery or their land modern irrigation. They refused to rent unused land to landless peasants for fear of giving the peasants dangerous ideas of ownership.

[...]

The reason for the civil war was simply that the people of Spain had fired their bosses for flagrant incompetence and the bosses had refused to be fired. 186

Although greatly simplifying the causes for the war, the coverage came out firmly on the side of the Republicans’ plight while representing Life’s first attempt to provide any degree of comprehensive coverage of the war. In choosing to describe the injustice and inequity of the working conditions of the Spanish people, Life was, in effect, appealing to one of the causes of the war that would resonate most strongly with the experiences of the American people. In newspapers, magazines, and certainly in Life, Americans had been inundated with domestic news of the CIO and the AFL, of unionizing industry and sit-down strikes shutting down businesses until demands were met or voices heard. Both the act of striking against unfavorable working conditions and the subsequent reporting of it by the press advanced the positive conceptions of American democracy.

Americans had little practical experience with a religious hierarchy like Spain’s top-heavy Catholic Church that had infiltrated all levels of governance and administered all public education, nor could Americans easily relate to being subjects of a ruling body that relied heavily on the spoils and reputation of its distant and barely recognizable predecessor, like Spain’s sixteenth century empire.

No one could have predicted that Capa’s *Falling Soldier* would become the scapegoat for examining the truth claims of not only the photographs of the Spanish Civil War, but war photography as an entire genre, extending all the way back to the medium’s inception. The image itself, a grainy shot of a man in a white collared shirt with rolled up sleeves collapsing backward onto his own shadow as his rifle just leaves his grip, shocks the viewer by depicting the exact moment of one man’s transition from life to death. Capturing the “decisive moment,” to borrow the term from Henri Cartier-Bresson, suspends the moment, allowing the viewer to study it, contemplate it, try to process it. Susan Sontag approached *Falling Soldier* as a tool of agitation, stating, “It is a shocking image, and that is the point. Conscripted as part of journalism, images [of the time] were expected to arrest attention, startle, surprise.” Certainly, the lasting impact of Capa’s image indicates both the initial and lasting strength of its resonance, while also embodying two powerful and potentially contradictory characterizations of photography as a medium: its apparent ability to capture a particular moment and its tendency to transcend that moment. *Falling Soldier* transcends the moment it captures in the sense that the image is still in circulation long after the Spanish Civil War ended and “long after its subject (and its maker) have passed on.” Since first appearing in 1936, the

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187 With Capa’s claim of capturing the moment a Republican soldier is hit by a Nationalist bullet near Cerro Muriano, Córdoba, a large array of claims have surfaced both attesting to the image’s truthfulness and invalidating it. The debate has gone unsettled largely because the initial negative has never been found, although the most comprehensive analysis of the image, undertaken by Robert Capa’s biographer Richard Whelan, comes out conclusively on the side of its veracity. See Richard Whelan, *Robert Capa* (New York: Knopf, 1985); also, Richard Whelan, *This Is War! Robert Capa at Work* (New York: ICP/Steidl, 2007), Chapter 2.


image has become embedded in enduring cultural narratives of not only the Spanish Civil War, but war itself in a much more generic sense.

Obviously not all images Life published became icons, even though they might depict similar landscapes and subject matter. The next four pages following Falling Soldier show stills from The Spanish Earth, a documentary about the Spanish Civil War directed by Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens and photographed by John Ferno. With captions written exclusively for Life by the already well-established Ernest Hemingway, the film is presented as “practically the first worthwhile picture coverage of the war” and “inevitably pro-Loyalist.” However, the film itself, released in the U.S. on August 20, 1937 (and not released in Spain until 1972), further publicized the civil war raging in Spain, and would later be seen as a cornerstone of the great Popular Front theatrical events, which coalesced in 1937 with the Mercury Theatre’s musical of Steeltown, USA, The Cradle Will Rock and the musical revue staged by New York garment workers, Pins and Needles.

In truth, the still images presented sequentially in Life may be more compelling than the early documentary itself. Four square images are paired in a series: first, two men aiming a bomb-projecting device from one block to another in University City; second, just after the explosion when the narrow window has filled with smoke and obscured view of the targeted building; third, another image as the dust is clearing; and finally, a shot of one of the buildings seen through “telescopic lens” having been hit. (Fig. 15) The three following pages are meant to draw connections between the still images presented in Life and their film counterparts. The default background of the page

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has been filled with black—an aesthetic distinction never before made in Life, but one that Life would eventually adopt to denote the printing of stills taken from a motion picture—the captions are printed in bold, white typeface and the corners of the images are rounded as if being projected from a reel. (Fig. 16)

Following the stills from The Spanish Earth is a page devoted to the events leading up to the war. (Fig. 17) A paragraph reads:

Almost forgotten today are the events that marched Spain inexorably into civil war. In 1931 a ‘bloodless revolution’ exiled King Alfonso XIII and brought to power a moderate government of middle-class intellectuals. Their painfully slow reforms were ended and wiped out in 1933, when Spanish women in their first election, voted in a reactionary government. Two years of too-familiar tyranny were enough to sweep another Leftist Government into power in the February, 1936 elections.194

The text continues to implicate both Rightist and Leftist forces in leading the country “inexorably” towards war, noting that between the February elections and the war breaking out in July nearly 430 men representing all colors of the political spectrum were assassinated. The Rightists’ gunmen “started a peacetime reign of Terror,” which was then reciprocated by the “more than tacitly” government protected Leftists. It continues by stating, “In a strict sense the Rightists had every reason to feel that the Government was party to a conspiracy to murder them. Whatever the weakness of their case, they had been brought to a feeling of desperate rage against the legal Government of Spain by July, 1936.” Perhaps the written content is meant to balance the previous pages’ blatantly pro-Republican message, initially in Life’s own words and then in Hemingway’s, by providing a more cynical approach to the righteous idealism partnered with the Republican cause. It is in a significant change of tone, then, that Life asserts that the Nationalists had “every reason” to feel their lives threatened under the Popular Front

government while displaying a certain degree of empathy concerning the “desperate rage” of the Nationalists under a government unresponsive to their desires. The images here, too, show a more critical approach to the potentially black-and-white nature of picking sides in the war—thus, *Life* manages to maintain a certain kind of neutrality by taking alternating approaches in portraying and defending one side of the conflict against the other.

### III. *Life* learns and gets serious about war

On October 25, 1937, *Life* published a photographic essay on the photographs taken of the Spanish Civil War that expressed an attempt to establish journalistic objectivity in their coverage. The article, entitled “Spanish Propaganda Pictures Appeal to World to Take Sides in Civil War,” openly acknowledges the powerful role of photography in the war effort. (*Fig. 18*) The first page of the article shows “some of the pictures with which both sides argue their cases” concerning the April 26 bombing of Guernica. Today the Nationalist bombing of Guernica is no longer in question, but here *Life* presents a “neutral” image of Guernica burning at night, a Republican image that shows Guernica “destroyed, somehow,” and a Nationalist image that “is supposed to prove that bombs did not start the fire because they also would have pitted the streets” whereas the image shows no pitted streets.\(^{195}\) The next two-page spread houses five images on each page and has the heading “These are Propaganda Pictures from the

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\(^{195}\) Guernica, “the spiritual center of Basque nationalism,” was destroyed by incendiary bombs on the afternoon of April 26, 1937. According to Michael Alpert, “The Nationalist authorities denied that aircraft under their command had bombed Guernica and insisted that the retreating Basques had destroyed the town themselves.” While it was revealed that the town had been bombed by German planes, conflicting accounts of the bombardment appeared in Spain and abroad. Only decades later did Franco’s spokesmen begin to acknowledge the Nationalists role in the bombing, and even then placed blame on Germany’s Condor Legion rather than Franco’s headquarters. Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, 125.
Spanish Loyalists” on one page, and the heading “These are Propaganda Pictures from the Spanish Rebels” on the other. (Fig. 19) A paragraph that straddles both pages reads, in part:

Photographs do not lie but the impressions they make and the captions attached to them often do. Here are reproduced some propaganda pictures of the Spanish Civil War. The pictures on this page are designed to arouse pity for the Loyalists, hatred of the Rebels. The pictures on the opposite page were released to arouse admiration for the Rebels, contempt for the Loyalists. LIFE neither believes nor disbelieves any of the captions attached by the Spanish antagonists to these pictures. All that is manifestly true about them is that each was issued by one side or the other to make a calculated impression. For if a man is mad enough to fight, he is mad enough to lie.¹⁹⁶

_Life_ distances itself from both the images and their captions, while asserting that each image has a specific case to make and message to convey. These images that “lie,” don’t look significantly different from those that _Life_ had previously published of the Spanish Civil War¹⁹⁷—showing primarily individual subjects, imported tools of war, the dead and destruction—but are presented here with a higher degree of remove and skepticism.

The propagandist image, designed expressly to persuade, is cast in more explicitly specific and deliberate terms that are, in turn, easier to decipher because their intended message is more urgently pronounced. As Caroline Brothers wrote, such images are “inflected and adapted to ensure maximum persuasive effect, they speak directly to the cultural concerns of the society at which they are directed, both in the subjects chosen for representation and in the way those subjects are portrayed,” and proceeds to state, “Such images […] provide but minimal information about what they literally depict; they reflect far more richly upon the attitudes and preoccupations of the society that deploys

¹⁹⁷ In fact, one image appears on the page designated as “Loyalist propaganda” that _Life_ had previously published on January 18, 1937 in the article “Spanish Rebels Have a Smuggler and a Snapshooter.” See page 19.
them and in which they have meaning.”

Brothers differs from Life’s 1937 assertion that images “do not lie but the impressions they make and the captions attached to them often do” in asserting the late-twentieth century view adopted by poststructuralists and postmodernists alike that even the images themselves are open to questioning in regards to the legitimacy of their referent.

By 1938, Time Inc. had produced fifty-six consecutive issues of Life and in the process Life had developed a much more concise editorial identity and practice. In the January 24, 1938 edition of Life, the Spanish Civil War was again featured as the “big news picture story,” appearing as the first article of the issue. A large image of three men lying lifeless in the foreground of a beautiful and mountainous landscape is introduced by the heading, “The World’s Two Wars: Teruel Falls and Tsingtao Burns.” (Fig. 20) Fourteen months into publication and over a year into the Republicans’ defense of Madrid, Life presents a forceful manifesto on war. Situated in the most visible editorial space of the magazine, it begins:

Once again LIFE prints grim pictures of War, well knowing that once again they will dismay and outrage thousands and thousands of readers. But today’s two great continuing news events are two wars—one in China, one in Spain. On Jan. 7 the Spanish civil war reached an historic crisis when the Rebel garrison of Teruel surrendered to the Loyalists, capping the greatest Loyalist victory of the war. On Dec. 18 the Chinese at Tsingtao destroyed the greatest single Japanese investment in China—the cotton mills of Tsingtao.

In the first sentence, Life—the singular term referring, presumably, to the entire body of individual reporters, photographers, staff, and editors of the magazine—states its decision to print graphic images of war despite their awareness that they will inspire “dismay and outrage” in the reader. The reader is therefore alerted to the awareness with which Life made its editorial decision to print the images of “today’s two great

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198 Brothers, War and Photography: A Cultural History, 2.
continuing news events.” By 1938, the juxtaposition of images of the wars in China and Spain was not uncommon in *Life* (an article in the ‘Camera Overseas’ appeared on November 1, 1937 with the heading “War in China and Spain”) and as both wars progressed, *Life* began to grant the images of war their own editorial space—rarely placing the images share on a page with non-related news or advertisements. However, as both wars progressed, the images that reached *Life*’s editorial table grew increasingly grave and it could be said that by equating images of war (however disparate the wars) could serve to marginalize them. This, however, is not the case with the January 28 manifesto, which appeared on page 9, as the first editorial of the issue. The statement continues:

> Obviously LIFE cannot ignore or suppress these two great news events in pictures. As events, they have an authority far more potent than any editors’ policy or readers’ squeamishness. But LIFE could conceivably choose to show pictures of these events that make them look attractive. They are not, however, attractive events. The important thing that happens in a prize fight is that one man hits another. Only a picture of a blow shows a fight. The important thing that happens in a war is that something or somebody gets destroyed. Victory comes to the side that destroys the greatest number of somebodies and somethings. Pictures of war are therefore pictures of something or somebody getting destroyed. The pictures on these pages of the Spanish war were taken by one of the world’s best news photographers, Robert Capa (see p. 53). But even the best pictures cannot show war in all its horror and ugliness. They may depict some of the blood, some of the broken bodies, some of the violence and destruction but they leave unrecorded the terrible will to kill, the even more terrible will to live, the long lonely pain and the utter heartbreak of a whole people. No picture can convey the sounds that come from a thousand dying men or the smells that come from a thousand dead men.

While expressing the magazine’s commitment to the reader in providing access to “great news events” regardless of their disquieting subject matter, the statement also reiterates *Life*’s responsibility to truthful and accurate representation of events with “authority far more potent than any editors’ policy or readers’ squeamishness.” The statement defends the images that appear in the article, asserting that even photographs taken by “one of
the world’s best news photographers […] cannot show war in all its horror and ugliness,” while claiming that the images might succeed in capturing a small part of the destruction of war but ultimately fall short in conveying its full totality and emotional distress. After acknowledging the inadequacy of the images printed in *Life*—or any images, anywhere—in illustrating the full reality of war, the statement provides the alternative sensory context of sound and smell. In the next paragraph, the statement contextualizes the accompanying image, and then dramatically compares the Spaniards’ knowledge of war with that of *Life*’s American readership:

The three men above met death along the road to Saragossa, northwest of Teruel, against the backdrop of the Universal Mountains. They knew war and their families know war, as the peace-loving people of America do not know war. For as a nation, this country has not known the full reality of war since Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse in 1865.

Claiming that Americans had no conception of modern warfare less than twenty years after the end of World War I was an incredibly bold and certainly controversial statement, and one only exacerbated by its claim that all Americans had not known the “full reality of war” since the American Civil War. *Life*’s claim then defines “knowing” war as experiencing war on one’s native soil, precluding the experience of war by individuals who fought in the American armed forces in the Spanish-American War and World War I from knowing the “full reality of war.” *Life*’s statement claims that the three dead Spaniards pictured on its pages knew war in a way that the American people do not. The statement concludes:

Americans’ noble and sensible dislike of war is largely based on ignorance of what modern war really is. The trouble with that kind of cloudy idealism is that it can too easily be overthrown and converted into an active will to fight a specific “good” war. The love of peace has no meaning or stamina unless it is based on a knowledge of war’s terrors. Only then, by contrast, can the benefits and blessings of the absence of war be fully appreciated and maintained. Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them.
Here *Life*’s statement grows more complex. Americans are ignorant, yet their distaste for modern war is “noble and sensible.” In describing the “trouble with that kind of cloudy idealism,” the tone is more colloquial, implying the editorial bias inherent in cautioning against acting on the will to fight a “good” war. *Life* situates the true “knowledge” of war as the only outlet through which peace can be fully appreciated, or even known, while insisting that the reader has a responsibility—a patriotic obligation, even—to view the startling images. The images printed with the article, which *Life* claims possess an “authority” that demands their publication, are introduced as representations of the type of war that Americans know so little of. (*Figs. 21, 22, 23*)

*Life*’s statement on war not only reflected the worsening conditions of the wars in Spain and China, but also served as the most direct indication of *Life*’s changing attitudes concerning its representation of war. *Life* recognized that the representation of war in images was not a benign practice, but one in which the editors could “conceivably choose”*200* images that portrayed the horrors of war in a more or less attractive way, and the American audience of *Life* was implored to view these images as not only indicative of the events of war, but also as persuasive tools with much larger underlying systems of meaning (as in the magazine’s coverage of “Spanish Propaganda,” *Fig. 18* and *19*).

By the spring of 1938, the Spanish Civil War was turning in the Nationalists’ favor as the Republican defense began to fissure. The Nationalists had triumphed over the Republicans both in the air and on the water, cutting off nearly all access routes. As a result, the Republicans’ supplies of war materials and provisions were severely constricted.*201* Although not commenting explicitly on the increasingly dismal outlook

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of Spain’s war for the antifascist resistance, *Life*’s coverage reflected a depleted enthusiasm and confidence in the Republican cause.

As 1938 went on, *Life* featured articles on the Spanish Civil War that depicted the desperation of the Republican plight (“A Spanish Army Corps Flees over the Pyrenees to France,” April 25), the appalling double nature of victories and defeats (“Spanish Rebels Grin at Capture of Loyalist Armored Car with Corpse,” July 11), and the return of American volunteers who served in the International Brigade (“American Fighters Against Fascism Come Home From Spanish Civil War,” October 31). As the news from Spain became increasingly grim, *Life* passed up the opportunity to report on the dramatic outcomes of the extensive Battle of the Río Ebro, which took place from July 25 into November 1938—with the Republicans taking the upper hand at first, only to be soundly defeated by the Nationalists in the end—and which proved the most devastating battle of the entire war. Many historians believe that it was the Battle of the Ebro that ultimately debilitated the People’s Army’s morale and operating ability. The Republicans’ failed military campaign at the Río Ebro was exacerbated by the Munich agreement in September where France and Britain granted Hitler Czechoslovakia, and which further revealed the weakened state of Western democracies by 1938 and depleted the Spanish Republicans’ hope for an anti-fascist alliance with the great powers.

Coverage of the Spanish Civil War became less regular as *Life* reported more and more news on Hitler’s aggressive military campaign across Europe. On January 30, 1939—just days after Barcelona fell to Franco’s army—*Life* printed the results of a poll that showed 51% of Americans supporting the Republican cause, 16% supporting the
Nationalists, and 33% remaining indifferent.\textsuperscript{202} By April, the Spanish Civil War was over.

**IV. Life goes on**

By the spring of 1940, *Life*’s weekly audience had reached nearly 20 million people and although *Life* celebrated its achievements in its own pages, *Life*’s longstanding editor-in-chief Henry Luce, had other concerns that he verbalized in a confidential memorandum headed “Subject: WAR” which was sent to his top executives in July 1940. With armed conflict raging in Europe, Luce wrote of his preoccupation with “the persistence of an American phobia about War,” and continued by stating, “Surely, in times like these, a great people should accept the risks of war just as cheerfully and confidently as they accept other major risks of life and death, of gain and loss, of pain and pleasure. Until the American people accept the risks of war as an inescapable element in the conduct of their affairs […]—until then everything else has only the value of a little preparatory time-saving.”\textsuperscript{203} Although Luce’s statement did not explicitly inform a new or revised editorial policy, it clearly expressed where he stood regarding the American reluctance to join the war effort.

Perhaps part of Henry Luce’s constant examination and revision of *Life*’s mission and guiding principles were founded in the prospect of realizing the very goal he had sent out to achieve. In *Life*, Luce created a magazine capable of effectively communicating ideas, incredibly powerful ideas, through the visual medium to a large and visually impressionable audience. Throughout Luce’s tenure at Time Inc., he struggled to find a balance between representing the news and representing the news that

appealed most to his own personal beliefs—an intense nationalistic pride, firm Christian ethics, and free market capitalism. In addressing his other publications, Luce himself announced in a series of internal memos that in the struggle between labor and capital, *Fortune* was on the side of capital.\(^{204}\) In late 1936, a profile of southern sharecroppers by James Agee and Walker Evans was rejected by *Fortune*; it later became the much acclaimed *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*.\(^{205}\)

A major struggle took place over *Time*'s coverage of the Spanish Civil War; poet and journalist Archibald MacLeish, who had served as a writer for *Time* and *Fortune* in addition to playing a significant role in helping Luce revise the prospectus for *Life*, had become an active figure in the American Popular Front movement and objected to *Time*'s editorial support of the fascists. By the summer of 1938, MacLeish had quit, and *Life* editor Ralph Ingersoll followed in the spring of 1939, going on to establish the Popular Front tabloid, *PM*.\(^{206}\) Despite Luce's own conservative politics, the innovations in mass journalism his magazines and newsreels pioneered—the techniques of documentary reenactment in the radio and film installments of the *March of Time*, the photojournalism of *Life*, and the investigative journalism of *Fortune*—led him to recruit the very artists, writers, and photographers who were drawn to the Popular Front social movement that resonated so strongly with the Spanish Civil War.\(^{207}\)

Luce's grand success with *Life*, and its immediate and enthusiastic incorporation into the American cultural landscape, was due to many factors, but the first years of publication were undeniably critical in its formative development—both editorially and

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\(^{204}\) Ibid., 124.
\(^{206}\) Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 84.
\(^{207}\) Ibid., 84-5.
in terms of its visual, graphic, and textual style. As Terry Smith observed, “The early years of *Life* were a battle against the drift of history, against the differentiating of nations and the globalizing of the local,” while noting that the magazine’s appeal was grounded “above all in its promise of a political and psychic consensus, one which would leave us free to live out with each other the pleasures, great and small, of sameness and difference.”

In coverage of Spain’s Civil War, *Life* was forced to confront the threat of fascism that was soon to engulf all of Europe. While the Spanish Civil War served as a “rehearsal” for World War II in military terms, it also served as a rehearsal for *Life* in visually representing war and navigating the idiosyncrasies inherent in bringing it to the masses.

Henry Luce would later acknowledge his striking inexperience with visual representation of the news before starting *Life*. He said of himself and the editors of *Life* in 1937, “We were all amateurs at this picture business.” Wilson Hicks corroborated in saying, “No magazine staff had had any experience in editing and writing a publication in which pictures would be made to tell a sensible and coherent story of a week’s news.”

Regardless, in October 1938, six months before the end of the Spanish Civil War and with *Life* boasting a circulation of over two million issues per week, a new tagline appeared in an advertisement just under *Life*’s now iconic sans serif logo: “LIFE: America’s Most Potent Editorial Force.” Indeed, as the Spanish Civil War progressed, *Life* referred less to the veracity of its images and more to the magazine’s widespread

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209 Hicks, *Words and Pictures*, 84.
210 Ibid., 84.
acceptance by the American public. The magazine became a tool of consensus, serving as a repository for visual traces of American culture.

The only path open to *Life* during its first years was a system of trial and error with multiple culturally and ideologically linked variables. Very few variables, if any, were set in stone. Even the length of the magazine fluctuated greatly.212 *Life*’s editors faced the task of a devising a working system in which images and text might be integrated to produce a general interest magazine that an American audience figuring in the millions would find engaging, informative and compelling, without being offensive, boring, or overly lewd.

Although *Life* generally did not succeed in relaying the full complexities of the events captured by the “Camera Overseas” or on the “American Newsfront” to its audience, it did succeed in bringing to an American audience visual representations of people, places, and events that millions of people found newsworthy and compelling. Perhaps Henry Luce said it best: “To *Life*, the sit-down strike is not Labor Problems or Big Words between a dozen men you don’t really give a damn about. In *Life*, the hot news of the sit-down strike is that people sit down! Or don’t. So simple. So unlike the *New York Times*. So relaxing. And yet so true.”213

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212 The first edition of *Life* was 96 pages long. The magazine swelled to 132 pages by September of 1937 (Vol. 3, No. 13), and had been reduced to 72 by September 1938 (Vol. 5, No. 13).
It is both significant and unexceptional that the editors of *Photo-History* chose the Spanish Civil War as the first topic to cover in their quarterly picture magazine in 1937. Although Spain’s civil war had made news in other illustrated American periodicals, the coverage had never been very prominent or adequately thorough, especially when compared with their French and British counterparts. By the time the first edition of *Photo-History* hit newsstands in March of 1937—nearly a month before its listed release date—coverage of the Spanish Civil War in *Life* had been editorially marginalized near the end of the magazine and coupled with other international news in the ‘Camera Overseas’ that often proved mundane or at times even culturally insensitive.

However, the first nine months of the war proved the most important in terms of deciding the extent of foreign involvement in Spain. Despite the terms prescribed by the Non-Intervention Pact, both France and England considered providing aid to the Republic while Germany and Italy continued to supply infantry and materiel to the Nationalist forces well into 1937. In the case of a democratic government like the United States, intervention was theoretically tied to the terms prescribed by public opinion, which was, at least in part, influenced by news coverage the war. Although it is now more commonly thought that the media doesn’t tell its subscribers what to think,

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but instead informs them of what to think about, news coverage—perhaps any coverage at all, but especially compelling coverage—can play a potentially decisive role in the mobilization of the masses.

The mass-produced picture magazines of the 1930s emerged as a new and persuasive representation of current events that national audiences accepted almost unconditionally with open arms. However, the coverage of the Spanish Civil War in *Life*, the periodical with the single highest circulation in the United States, rarely gave adequate context to the images of the war, and as a result, obscured its full meaning. *Photo-History*, on the other hand, employed a format and unifying principle that allowed it to explore issues more comprehensively. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, *Photo-History* began by introducing the viewer to the visual register of Spain and its people, and continued to outline the timeframe and events that led the country into a deeply polarized social and political stalemate that erupted into civil war almost overnight. In addition to covering the July rebellion and the subsequent Nationalist offensives initiated across the country, *Photo-History* denoted the vested interests of Hitler and Mussolini in Spain’s strategic territory and resources and celebrated the Republican defense of Madrid.

In its enthusiasm to convey the importance and immediacy of the war raging in Spain, *Photo-History* perhaps fell victim to the dangerous sensationalism that characterized much of the print media journalism at the turn of the twentieth century. While billing itself as providing the necessary historical context for an American audience to better comprehend current events, *Photo-History* exercised value judgments that compromised its journalistic integrity. The magazine intended to evoke in the reader the vivid,

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personal, and poignant responses warranted by images depicting war’s abominable
events, but in the process, undermined its own authority as an agent of comprehensive
news media by relying too heavily on manically alternating between invigorating
emotional elation and crushing emotional disillusionment. While succeeding in eliciting
strong emotions in the reader, Photo-History concludes its coverage of the Spanish Civil
War on a positive note, but ultimately may have failed in motivating the reader to action.

I. Photo-History comes to life

On May 10, 1937, Time magazine reported on the launch of three new picture
magazines: Foto, a bimonthly that billed itself as “the Candid Camera Magazine,” Pic, a
monthly rotogravure magazine devoted exclusively to sports, and Photo-History, a large-
format quarterly representing a single subject per issue. Noted in the same article was
nascent picture magazine Look’s decision to begin producing their magazine biweekly,
instead of monthly. The grand success of the picture magazine on the American
newsfront was no longer in question: Life magazine had paved the road for a large variety
of new and dynamic ventures, and by the summer of 1937 the picture magazine was well
on its way to becoming a hallmark of American media.

On Photo-History, Time magazine wrote, “Editor-Publisher Richard Storrs Childs,
a socialite young Yaleman, intends to devote 68 LIFE-sized pages each quarter to a
thorough pictorial takeout of one current subject,” and after using Life as a standard for
comparison, distinguished Photo-History from the other newly launched magazines by
stating simply, “Photo-History has a novel idea behind it.”216

216 “Little One, Big Ones,” Time, May 10, 1937, 43-44.
The idea behind Photo-History was to produce a magazine for a sizable modern audience that provided comprehensive historical background on a current news issue of the day with the intention of enabling readers to better grasp contemporary events in an increasingly complex social and political world. As explained on the inside back cover of the first edition of Photo-History, “By means of photographs and explanatory text, the editors hope to make concrete and real the forces lying behind today’s headlines.”

As a quarterly picture magazine that aimed to explore one “important event of current world history” per issue, Photo-History employed an innovative and distinctly modern assemblage of images, maps, charts, text and newspaper headlines in each edition, some of which were specifically generated for publication in Photo-History and others which were culled from other news sources, such as the New York Times and Fortune magazine. However, it was mainly through artfully arranged images and self-generated headings that Photo-History aimed to make the “forces” behind the news both “concrete and real.”

The magazine was printed entirely in black and white except for the use of a single color to highlight the magazine’s name and subject on the front and back covers, and was printed almost entirely without advertisements. Dated April 1937, the first edition covered the war in Spain; first by outlining the various grievances of the Spanish

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217 “War in Spain.” Photo-History 1, no. 1 (April 1937): [inside back cover].
218 Ibid.
220 There were no advertisements in the entire first edition of Photo-History. The back cover of the second edition featured an ad for Modern Age Books, and on the back cover of the third edition was an ad for Seal Books, a subsidiary of Modern Age Books, offering “$29 worth of established favorites for $2.50” (i.e. paperback editions of literary classics). The fourth edition of Photo-History has two advertisements, one for Modern Age Books on the inside back cover and one on the back cover for the documentary book You Have Seen Their Faces, heralded as “book of the year” and “a memorable social document,” by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White and published by Modern Age Books. Thus, although a few ads do appear in Photo-History, they are not integrated into the body of the magazine nor do they use comparable layout techniques to those found for photographs in the magazine.
people against the governing body and continuing by illustrating the four vastly different
governments that alternately took power during the five year period beginning in 1931,
highlighting the heroic and unlikely defense of Madrid by the Republican faction, and
concluding with ample coverage of the ongoing civil war while implying the imminence
of world war. With a price of 35¢, the first issue of Photo-History sold out its 100,000
issue print-run within a week and received largely favorable press reviews.221

As was the case with almost all picture magazines launched in the United States
in the mid-1930s, the editorial and aesthetic style of Photo-History underwent significant
changes as subsequent issues were produced. The first edition exhibits traces of
experimentation with a large variety of editorial and visual layout and content styles,
which are both less varied and more formulaic in later editions.222 In addition, later
editions were marketed more thoroughly.223 An ad printed in the New York Times on
March 30, 1938 reads:

[...] In less than an hour you can absorb the facts and ideas illustrated in [Photo-
history’s] pages and remember what they told. This is not studying or learning
history—this is Seeing History Happen!

Photo-history is more than a picture magazine. It is a dramatic visual record of
events in history, summarized and organized against the background of WHY

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221 In May 1937 Time reported that the first print-run sold out within a week, although subsequent editions
of Photo-History noted that “a limited number of Photo-History: 1, ‘War in Spain’” were still available for
purchase upon request. Indeed, even by the time the fourth edition of Photo-History reached newsstands
early in 1938, back numbers of the first edition were still available. "Little One, Big Ones."
222 For example, the first edition of Photo-History (“War in Spain”) printed text in multiple different
typefaces, offered no table of contents, rarely contextualized images sufficiently with text or captions, and
published only two page-long editorials in the entire issue. By the fourth edition, the magazine had
developed a much more professional and authoritative journalistic bearing, while maintaining a distinctly
modern look; there was an exponential increase in quantity of text—both in the form of editorial content
and captions, while the sans-serif typeface was made consistent throughout the magazine. Although the
later editions of Photo-History were somewhat less radical in visual content, they exercised a more polished
artistic design in terms of the formatting and layout of images, as well as in the integration of pertinent
text.
223 See Display Ad 54 – No Title, New York Times, November 16, 1937, 16; Display Ad 71 – No Title, New
they happened. [...] One hundred thousand busy, intelligent people now keep up with history this quick, sure, picture way.\textsuperscript{224}

Marketed as representing a complete yet comprehensible historical narrative of complex current events, \textit{Photo-History} was advertised to people already reading the newspaper, but interested in an efficient and “dramatic visual record of events in history.” The ad distinguishes \textit{Photo-History} as something more than a picture magazine, classifying it instead as a visual “record,” thereby evoking the 1930s rhetoric of photographic documentation that situated the photograph as a document of “precision, measurement, calculation, and proof.”\textsuperscript{225}

Although novel, \textit{Photo-History} was short-lived.\textsuperscript{226} Enduring only through a single year print cycle, the four editions produced covered issues that stood at the forefront of American domestic and international news. The first issue covered the war in Spain, while the second edition was entitled “Labor’s Challenge” and sought to explain and extrapolate on the history of the labor debate being waged across the United States, providing context regarding labor conditions before widespread industrialization and commenting on the future of unions. The third issue, dated October-December 1937, had the title “War is Here” and made the case that World War I, referred to in \textit{Photo-History} as the “Great War,” had failed as the “war to end all wars” and that war was again upon the American people. The straightforward and matter-of-fact approach \textit{Photo-History} adopted mirrored prominent American newspapers’ day-to-day breaking news in the coming months of Hitler’s progressing totalitarian regime, but at the time \textit{Photo-
History: 3 hit newsstands, denial and undermining of the severity of events transpiring in Western Europe and South Asia was widespread. Photo-History’s condensed news format and the emphatically declarative title of the third edition presented a powerful and convincing account of the impending war threatening boiling point in Western and Central Europe. While magazines like Life and Look covered timely news stories concerning Hitler’s progressive acts of aggression or rearmament efforts across Europe, it was decidedly uncharacteristic for an American picture magazine to take such a strong and, to many readers, cynical, approach to current events. To make the statement “War is Here” in the late months of 1937 was indeed a potent and politically loaded one, which placed Photo-History in a position of reporting news the American public didn’t necessarily want to hear. Furthermore, not only did Photo-History: 3 acknowledge the war at hand in Europe and South Asia, but its tone was harsh and disillusioned, claiming that those who died in World War I did so in vain while highlighting the deplorable conditions of modern warfare.

The final edition of Photo-History bore the title “China Reborn,” and was dated January-April 1938. It elaborated on the nature of China’s land, culture and people, and chronicled the ongoing war being waged in China as a “prelude to catastrophe,” all the while acknowledging the outcome of the Chinese war as interrelated to the impending world war. Notably, this edition appeared after the U.S. made a critical move in condemning Japan as an aggressor for forcibly invading China, thereby acknowledging the breaching of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which had previously retained some semblance of legitimacy.

The copyright for Photo-History was filed with Modern Age Books, a publishing firm based in New York City that was owned and operated by Photo-History proprietor
Richard Storrs Childs and Samuel W. Craig. Modern Age Books specialized in titles oriented towards a liberal-minded readership, and served as one of the first purveyors of paperback books.\textsuperscript{227} Without further explanation, Modern Age Books was dissolved during World War II despite a clear popular demand for affordable and timely books.\textsuperscript{228} However, during its years of operation, Modern Age Books served to give voice to the “Cultural Front” borne out of Popular Front politics, which had initially taken form in the United States in the San Francisco General Strike of 1934 and came to represent not only members of the American labor force fighting for workers’ rights, but the cultural producers that emerged as the literary voices for nearly an entire generation.\textsuperscript{229}

As either an innovative media form or an experiment in photographic representation, \textit{Photo-History} has rarely been discussed by historians or photography theorists. Michael Denning refers to \textit{Photo-History} as a “short-lived but exceptionally powerful photomagazine which documented contemporary history, selling popular illustrated accounts of the war in Spain and the rise of the CIO for a quarter,” and situates the magazine as “one of several attempts to create a Popular Front picture magazine.”\textsuperscript{230} However accurate, Denning’s statement reflects the retroactive analysis of the movement as a whole, and it is worth noting that \textit{Photo-History} never specifically stated a Popular Front stance, although it is very likely that the magazine’s intended audience included members of the Popular Front.

\textsuperscript{227} As written in Denning, “There were several short-lived attempts to create a left-wing equivalent of the tremendously successful Book-of-the-Month Club, including Book Union, the Book Find Club, and the Labor Book Club. One of the first experiments with paperback books was Modern Age Books, backed by Richard Storrs Child[s], which featured both mystery novels and popular political works like Bruce Minton and John Stuart’s \textit{Men Who Lead Labor} and Leo Huberman’s \textit{The Labor Spy Racket}.” Michael Denning, \textit{The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century}, ed. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker, The Haymarket Series (London: Verso, 1996). See also, “Cheap Books,” \textit{Time}, Jul. 10, 1939.


\textsuperscript{229} Denning, \textit{The Cultural Front}, xv.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 93.
In order to succeed as a picture magazine without the circulation or staff of its competitors, *Photo-History* needed a regular and loyal readership. Although the exact reasons for ceasing publication were never disclosed, *Photo-History* seems to have struggled in garnering sufficient sales. The newsstand price of the first edition was 35¢—about the same cost as admittance to a movie at the local cinema—231—and the price was reduced to 25¢ for the three subsequent issues, a price tag higher than that of *Life* or *Look*, which both sold for 10¢. In the third and final editions of *Photo-History*, a yearlong subscription was offered at $1.00 and as a bonus, subscribers were offered their choice of “free best-selling paperbacks” from Modern Age Books including titles such as *From Spanish Trenches*, a series of letters from the Spanish fronts compiled by Marcel Acier, and *Kaltenborn Edits the News* by H.V. Kaltenborn. Seventy years after *Photo-History* graced American newsstands, it is held in the libraries of a limited number of universities across the United States. There are only forty copies of the first edition listed worldwide on the WorldCat archiving database, and even fewer for later editions.

II. PHOTO-HISTORY: 1, “War in Spain”

The cover of the first edition of *Photo-History* shows a picturesque landscape photographed from higher ground, looking down over a valley dotted with trees and partially divided into farming plots. (Fig. 24) Seven milicianos appear in the foreground of the image, some aiming rifles at an unseen target and some sitting on or around a makeshift protection barrier made of large rocks, but all seemingly unaware of being photographed. The subject situated farthest right in the frame—and best illuminated by

the afternoon sun—appears to be a woman, wearing a knee-length dress and shoulder-length hair, but lying prone and scanning the horizon just like her male contemporaries.

The image situates the scene in an attractive geographic location without giving it an easily recognizable specificity—the people are faceless and nameless, the landscape is beautiful without being overly descript. A large red circle circumscribes the words “WAR IN SPAIN” in the lower right quadrant of the image, bringing the viewer’s focal point in the image to the unoccupied space behind the barrier.

Upon opening the magazine, the inside front cover of *Photo-History: 1* shows an image occupying the entire space of the page, leaving no room for margins or edges—a “bleed” image—of a man lying supine, almost certainly dead but visibly unarmed. *(Fig. 25)* He is not in military uniform and could feasibly be one of the men pictured on the cover, but it remains unclear and any speculation falls to the viewer. The image is spatially well composed, although the dead man’s proximity to a stone wall obscures the dimensions of his body and makes it difficult to discern the angle at which the photographer captured the image and thus, how close the photographer was to the dead while making the image. Printed in small type in the white space of the sky above the horizon are photo credits and acknowledgments. The photographs are not individually credited as they appear on the page nor are they acknowledged as taken by specific photographers, but instead the credits list only the photo agency the images were taken from—a list that includes essentially all the premier photo outlets of the day: Black Star, Pix, Pictures Incorporated, Wide World, Publisher’s Photo Service, European Picture Service News-Photos, Inc., International News Photos, Inc., Triangle, and Acme.

In one copy of the magazine examined, a small piece of paper has been pasted into the issue, which reads:
The Editors of PHOTO-HISTORY wish to state that The New York Times in its coverage of the Spanish War has not only had correspondents on both sides of the Civil War but has throughout maintained its tradition of impartiality. The Editors of PHOTO-HISTORY assume full responsibility for the selection of headlines taken from the New York Times appearing in this book.

This addition to the magazine, however haphazardly affixed, suggests that the New York Times had protested the use of their material and inspires a slight sense of skepticism in the viewer in regard to the editorial stance of Photo-History. The New York Times is referenced as committed to its “tradition of impartiality,” and, however bureaucratic the phrasing, it might occur to the viewer that this tradition is made possible only over time while allowing the viewer to deduce that Photo-History makes no allegations concerning its own policy of impartiality in reporting on current events. This added disclaimer differs from two separate copies of the same issue consulted in the process of researching the first issue of Photo-History. The first copy of Photo-History viewed had no attachment whatsoever, while the second bore the same disclaimer but instead of having been pasted to the inside cover, it was printed on a separate piece of paper and stapled in the binding in between the first and second leaves. The disclaimer was then clearly added after the first editions had been printed but before they reached the public, and perhaps executed by sole request of the New York Times, since no other media outlet is mentioned and very few, if any, other newspaper’s headlines are used.  

232 It is worth noting that although headlines from the New York Times are still used in later editions of Photo-History, contributions from a wider variety of newspapers are more common in subsequent editions, which is made apparent by the diversity of typefaces in the newsprint. Although no news outlets are credited by name in subsequent issues, Photo-History began crediting individual photographers or agencies for specific images, sources referenced, as well as the unnamed “photo associates” responsible for the design and layout of the magazine. By the fourth and final edition of Photo-History, a brief paragraph appears in an acknowledgments section on the last page, perhaps precluding the sort of disclaimer initially deemed necessary by the New York Times, which reads, “The Editors of Photo-History assume full responsibility for the selection of newspaper headlines appearing in this book, and for the conclusions to which their use may here contribute.” By not only taking responsibility for the selection of newspaper coverage reprinted in Photo-History, but also the conclusions the reader might draw from the presentation thereof, the editors of the magazine manage to protect the integrity of the media outlets from which they borrow without making an explicit assertion of their own editorial stance. It is, however, implied that the
Inlaid in a bleed photograph on the first page of *Photo-History: 1* is a foreword providing background on the war in Spain, which serves to introduce the reader not only to the Spanish Civil War, but also to the perspective and editorial stance furthered in the magazine. (*Fig. 26*) The foreword sets up a dialectical opposition between the Spain of the sixteenth century, represented by the “rebels” and those supporting their cause (the landed aristocracy, the army, and the higher clergy), and the Spain of the twentieth century, represented by the Republican Government and “the people.” The foreword openly and easily equates the Spanish Republic with the institutions and beliefs of the American people in stating that the democratically elected Spanish government had “opened the way for the establishment of […] rights of personal liberty, progressive government, and advancement in education and culture which have long been the heritage of the American People.” By aligning the Republican movement with foundational beliefs and principles of the United States, the side of the conflict the American reader of *Photo-History* is expected to support in the Spanish Civil War is made abundantly clear.

The first few pages of *Photo-History: 1* illustrate the great disparity between the rich and the poor in Spain, which seem here to correlate almost directly to the powerful and the powerless. The first full two-page spread shows images of quintessential Spain under the simple heading “Spain” in giant sans serif block letters, and beneath a stylized map of the country closely bordered by a thick white line—images of an old castle, a pair of yoked oxen guided by two peasant farmers, an attractive cityscape, men casually socializing at a café, a bull-fighting stadium. (*Fig. 27*) The images present an idea of Spain as romantic, yet industrialized and Spaniards as people of the earth, yet civilized. In that information presented in *Photo-History* is persuasive as an argument and might lead the reader to draw “conclusions” that the editors of the magazine played a certain, if explicitly undisclosed, role in advancing.
they appear somewhat like carefully crafted publicity photographs, they seem to embody something of the photojournalism of the 1930s Michael Griffin described—that is, an increasingly “established practice, albeit one that loosely straddled conventional notions of documentary, news, information, opinion, publicity, and propaganda.”

In a stark departure from the vast majority of other picture magazines at the time, the images *Photo-History* employs do not correspond to individual captions. Captions that would normally contextualize the scene or subject temporally, guide the viewer’s reaction or interpretation, or shed light on certain aspects or components of the image are not applied here and thus force the viewer to experience the constructed reality of the picture magazine in a new and unfamiliar way. The words on the printed page do not necessarily address what is depicted in the images nor do they provide the standard contextualization generally provided by captions. Instead, the reader is encouraged to draw their own narrative connections between the text and the images without more explicit editorial guidance. At times the text is a quotation or a newspaper headline, other times a heading or a block of text presumably composed for specific use in the magazine. Here, the text is meant to supplement the images and sometimes to complement them, but not to reiterate them.

This first full spread serves as an introduction to the standard visual register and natural landscape of Spain—a country that very few readers, if any, would have seen first-hand. The images recall publicity photos—with warm, natural lighting and healthy levels of tonal contrast—descriptive of a specific and calculated ideal of a peaceable Spain, captured in images with an attractive and seemingly benevolent light. The map

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shows the topographical variation of the Iberian Peninsula, focusing on mountain ranges and rivers. However, the map does not locate any major cities or verbally distinguish Portugal from Spain, nor does it establish a scale for the size of the country or locate it in relation to the rest of the world; thus, Spain is given a physical landscape while still remaining abstract and intentionally unproblematic. On the opposite page is a simple layout of four images—comparable to a page layout one might find in *Life* save for the bottom-right image significantly overlapping the bottom left, a slight and early indication of *Photo-History’s* edginess, its departure from the increasingly normalized middle-class visual language—that frame a block of text. (Fig. 27) It reads:

… Once a world empire, Spain gradually slipped from its ancient grandeur. In provinces separated by lofty mountains, with backs to one another and faces to the sea, the Spanish people lived isolated from their neighbors and from the modern world. Grim castles frowned upon a toiling peasantry. Magnificent cathedrals cast an everlasting shadow over a poor and faithful people. Fantastic but mighty relics of a dead past, they crowded on the industry, the science, and the hope of a new and living Spain. Men and women of the factory, shop, office, laboratory, and classroom wondered at the drone of airplanes, at the hum of electric lines,—at a cavalcade of Bishops, Kings, and Grandees… The history of Spain for a century and more is the history of a people engaged in a struggle to throw off their feudal fetters.\(^{234}\)

According to *Photo-History*, it is not only the conscious human players that have subjected the Spanish people to a severely compromised quality of life, but also the material manifestations of their collective heritage and former grandeur that contributed to the feudal establishment’s hegemonic control and rejection of political and social change. Poetic and indicative of much larger class struggle, the Spanish Civil War is thus presented as the culminating battle for centuries of unrealized change that had come to represent the progress of the modern, industrialized age.

\(^{234}\) “War in Spain.” *Photo-History* 1, no. 1 (April 1937): [unpag.], emphasis added.
As a further contextual introduction, the next two pages host images that illustrate the headings “City” and “Country,” which are printed in a stylized cursive typeface and serve as the only text on either page. Four rectangular images of varying sizes appear on each page, formatted with ample white space separating each image—a layout reminiscent of a standard photo album outfitted with innocuous, but well composed snapshots with sufficient aesthetic appeal and symmetry to hold the viewer’s attention. The viewer is not led to believe that the images or the presentation are pushing a certain agenda, but moreover that these are impartial representations of two varied settings for Spanish life. In showing leisure, labor, and industry, the images depict the basic realms of life the Spanish people inhabit without commenting directly on the nature or condition of the people themselves.

Turn the page and the tone begins to shift. (Fig. 28) The images appear closer together, some overlap while others are closely cropped around their subject matter and bordered by a 3/8” white line, and there is a clear focus on the human subjects in the images. Most depict subjects working alone at tasks or outfitted in a way that denotes their professions, including a doctor who is shown treating a patient and a teacher giving a young girl a doll. Text spanning both pages reads, “The people… Peasants, Workers, Shopkeepers, Doctors, Lawyers, Teachers, were dominated by:” and thus leads into the list that begins on the proceeding page. The viewer is struck by the word “dominated” in this context given that the individuals shown here appear wholesome and hardworking, contributing to the common good and comfortable in their respective roles.

The list continues over the next three pages, with each listed offender allocated its own page: absentee landlords, the army, and a feudal church. The layout and imaging
of the page devoted to absentee landlords is especially poignant—systematically
deploying two specific images to illustrate a much larger point. (Fig. 29) Under the large
heading “1: ABSENTEE LANDLORDS,” two images appear: the top image depicts
just the hands of two individuals sitting at leisure and thus connoting the absentee
landlords, while the much larger bottom image shows a young farmer outdoors in the
high sun, representing the non-landowning half of the equation. The first image,
relatively small and formatted so as to overlap its larger counterpart by nearly two inches,
shows two hands, the right hands of a man and a woman sitting opposite one another,
lightly holding dainty wine glasses atop a small café table. The hands are notably young
and not particularly worn. Here the emotive empathy of the close-up is evoked, an
element of visual discourse that had been recently established by German photographers
such as Lerski, and by FSA photographers invoking the injustices of the wearing on the
human body by unrewarded hard work,235 as well as by the Hollywood glamour shot,
which endowed the celebrity with a familiar face in addition to a familiar name.236 In
Photo-History, the artfully cropped close-up serves as a tool to inspire indignation at the
faceless landowners on the farmer’s behalf; the viewer’s empathy is thus two-fold, not
only in commiseration with the farmer’s plight but also in anger at the shameless
exploitation on the part of the idle landowners. The farmer is given a face and
environment in the large accompanying image, which shows a boy looking directly at the
camera from the back of a rickety farming carriage being pulled by two mules,
reminiscent of an FSA image of tenant farmers but with a slightly more cinematic tilt.
The boy is attractive and looks squarely and inquisitively at the camera’s lens, as if in not
actively seeking the viewer’s pity he more effectively captures it. The editorial point is

235 Cf. Russell Lee for the FSA, Hands of Mrs. Andrew Ousmer, wife of a homesteader, 1936.
236 Smith, Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America, 299.
further pronounced by the aesthetic decision to overlap the image of the hands over that of the young farmer, leading the viewer to approach the hands image first while also indicating the literal “domination” of the landowners over the peasants.

A block of text sits at the lower right-hand corner of the page and provides dense, stark statistics of land and wealth distribution. The text reads:

Even the dust on the tombstones…” of the village of Paredes, was owned by its lord, a typical absentee. These lords were the 2% who owned 67% of the land. They wintered on the Riviera and summered in Madrid. They clinked glasses while 3,000,000 peasants asked for land… peasants who worked 14 hours a day for 50 cents… remained 80% illiterate—sinking into the bitter servitude of “A land without a people, a people without a land.

While the text provided makes a generalization of all landlords and all peasants, the images illustrate a single example—even if it’s an example without a singular form of specificity since the farmer remains nameless and the landlords remain faceless. The images represent types, not individuals, evoking the terms of physiognomic harmony that German photographer August Sander explored at the end of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{237} Sander, who believed that universal knowledge was to be gained from the careful probing and truthful representation of every aspect of the natural world, attempted to create a visual document of “Man in Twentieth Century Germany” through a series of portraits organized in a “sociological arc” that began with “peasants, ascended through students, professional artists, and statesmen, and descended through urban labor to the unemployed”\textsuperscript{238}; in the process, he would make viewers aware of stratification of society and the social and cultural dimensions of everyday life. In Photo-History’s representation of the landlords as faceless, the magazine does not allow for the reading of moral character through facial type or expression that was championed by physiognomic

\textsuperscript{237} For more on August Sander, see Gunther Sander, ed., \textit{August Sander: Citizens of the Twentieth Century, Portrait Photographs, 1892-1952} (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1980).

\textsuperscript{238} Rosenblum, \textit{A World History of Photography}, 378.
harmony. The more temperate “sociological arc” of Sander’s work is revised and reduced in Photo-History to a quick descent, representing the “domination” of the people expressed on the preceding two-page spread outlining the “types” of the Spanish people.

In illustrating “absentee landlords,” Photo-History fosters a more interpretive approach to the viewing of the images printed on its pages. Instead of taking a specific set of images and using them as an accurate representation of real events, and then drawing a larger conclusion predicated on their status as photomechanically reproduced evidence of reality, the images used to illustrate the absentee landlords in Photo-History deny specificity as a way of illustrating the omnipresence of the problem.

In a shift of the organizational schema of the magazine’s contents, a chronological account of events begins immediately after the list of the Spanish people’s aggressors—a distinct editorial change made without any aesthetic distinction to distinguish the change in narrative. Photo-History’s headlines read, “April 1931” and “Alfonso departs.” Directly below them is a section reproduced from King Alfonso XIII’s “Manifesto of April 15, 1931,” and the headlines from the front page of the New York Times on April 15, 1931, which reads “King Alfonso Quits, Spain a Republic; Alcala Zamora is First President; Nation Orderly Under Martial Law.”239 (Fig. 30) The Times’ use of the word “quits” remains ambiguous enough to accurately describe Alfonso’s departure, which was neither a formal abdication nor renunciation of the throne. Although the Times originally printed a formal portrait of Alfonso (credited to Willard Van Dyck) to illustrate the front-page story, Photo-History cropped the excerpt from the New York Times so as to preserve the layout of the headlines and bylines, but instead used

239 The cutout headline is not dated or specifically attributed to the New York Times here, or in any part of the magazine. For the full article written by Frank L. Kluckhohn, consult Page One: Major Events 1925-1975 as Presented in the New York Times (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 54.
a photo of an officer on horseback amidst a large crowd of people. The officer’s face is stern and he’s in the process of twisting his body backward in the saddle so that he faces one direction while his horse faces another; it is made clear that even though the mass of people around him aren’t forcibly or intentionally restricting his movements, he remains immobile regardless. He forcefully points his baton across the crowd and out of the frame while the crowd looks on passively—some smiling faintly, others without visible emotion, but their relative indifference making it apparent that the people have the upper hand in the situation by virtue of sheer number. Here the officer looks alone and overextended, and not a little fearful; his lips are taut and the bags under his eyes suggest sleep deprivation or stress. The image seems to bring into question the New York Times’ assertion that Spain was, in fact, “orderly” under martial law while not openly refuting it.

In the following pages, the events of 1933 and 1934 are described simply as “2 years of tyranny,” and allude to general dissatisfaction with the government on the behalf of both left and right-leaning Spaniards. Five photographs, all of similar size and shot from a similar perspective, appear on the two-page spread. The images are placed on the page in a pattern that breaks the spread into quadrants, but doesn’t allow the viewer’s eye to rest in any one place or on any particular image. The images and layout are the most dull to yet appear in the magazine, almost encouraging the viewer to quickly pass over the Photo-History’s account of the Rightist government’s two years in power in between the first and second Spanish Republics.

In large block letters, 1935 is presented as the year when the Popular Front “organized against reaction” and is justified in Photo-History by stating that “[o]ppressed by the Reaction, the people formed a great Popular Front movement to seek anew the objectives of the Republic.” In addition to two images showing large-scale rallies with
thousands of participants, two portraits appear—one of Garcia Oliver and the other of Largo Caballero, both influential figures in the Popular Front and shown here at close range and in humanizing and seemingly candid poses. On the previous pages depicting the events of 1933 and 1934, images illustrating Rightist government’s tenure in office show mass graves, peasants seeking refuge, and isolating images of individual supporters of the Right. Here images of the Popular Front stand in absolute contrast, showing both interesting portraits of individual leaders and images documenting instances of widespread public support.

Also printed on the page is a numbered list of the reform agenda of the Popular Front that mirrors those shown in two different but complementary images of men reading large posters affixed to walls on public streets. Posters were an inexpensive, quick, and minimally mediated way to transmit information to a public audience, and played a significant role in the shaping and rallying of public opinion in Spain during the war. The list we see in Photo-History serves as a poster surrogate for the American audience, while the images provide the American reader with a formative example of how Spaniards look and react upon reading the same information and thus, the visual content informs the processing of the editorial content. The mirroring effect of the posters in the images and the list in the magazine functions to empower the reader by drawing a correlation between the experience of the Spanish people and the reader of Photo-History. Additionally, the list invokes the timeliness of the magazine by not only making the reader feel as if he or she is reading the same information as the Spaniards

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while they are reading it, but also illustrating the viability of disseminating information through a variety of different media forms.

About a third of the way through the magazine, Photo-History illustrates the victory of the Popular Front in the February 16, 1936 elections and takes on an air of exuberance. The images depict events associated with the election in chronological order—from images of people voting, a portrait of the newly instated Republican cabinet, massive crowds of people celebrating in Madrid, political prisoners of the previous regime granted amnesty and joyously being released from jail, and then throngs of people in the street in a “right-wing provoked” riot. While depicting moments of strong emotion made visible by the animated facial expressions on a variety of different subjects in different contexts—alluding to a consensus of approval for the Popular Front government among the Spanish people—some images also show instances of motion frozen on film, adding a sense of temporal immediacy. Accompanying a widely published image of a large Popular Front celebration in Madrid is a caption that reads, “Crowds celebrating People's Front Victory in Madrid.” In providing a caption, much less one that simply reiterates the points most clearly manifest in the image, Photo-History takes a meaningful departure from its own precedent of not using descriptive captions.

However, the mood takes a sudden downturn as attention turns quickly to the rebellion. (Fig. 31) Under the headline “The Ballots Failed Them” is a brief description:

Absorbed with the problems of public order the Popular Front government failed to check the activities of plotting militarists and disgruntled aristocrats who were plotting its overthrow. In February, and again in March, 1936, General José Sanjurjo conferred in Berlin with Hitler and placed an order for large quantities of war materials. These orders were countersigned by Gil Robles and Juan March, the political and financial backers of the reaction. Plans for a military uprising took definite shape.
While *Photo-History*’s headline alleges that it was the democratic process that failed the people, the images show only the individual actors who played critical and decisive roles in the uprising. A military portrait of General Sanjurjo and a candid portrait of independent financier Juan March appear accompanying descriptions of their considerable wrongs against the Spanish Republic, while an image of the general staff shows four largely unimpressive men standing at varying degrees of attention. The caption plainly identifies the figures, “Generals Mala, de Llano, Franco and Cabanellas,” and continues to condemn them: “Though they took the oath of loyalty to the Republic, they daily plotted to destroy with bullets the verdict of the ballot box.” As pictured here they hardly look menacing as individuals, and perhaps look even less so as a group, but the forcefulness of the caption’s assertion begs the viewer to look deeper and harder for the source of their malevolence and resentment—their motive. However, the image gives the viewer very little to work with without further contextualization. The men stand in pairs, with the taller men, Mola and de Llano, in back and turned slightly toward one another in casual conversation. Franco and Cabanellas stare blankly forward, Cabanellas with a drowsy or mildly confused expression on his face. No artwork appears on the wall behind them, nor is their location easily discernible. The caption therefore prompts the viewer’s frustration in an inconclusive search for rational justification of the Generals’ disloyalty to the Republic in the images provided.

The next two-page spread differs so greatly from the one implicating the ballots that it appears as if it might be found in a different magazine altogether. (Fig. 32) It is here that the Nationalists’ motives for their injustices committed against the people are articulated. In an innovative and visually stimulating format, the spread is divided by a thick duo-toned line that diagonally bisects the two pages, connecting the two pages in
terms of content but visually further dividing them; the top half indicates “what Mussolini wants” while the bottom half denotes “what Hitler wants.” The spread illustrates an especially dynamic integrative use of image, illustration, text, and graphic—activating the entire space of the spread and producing a charged and nearly frenetic transmission of visual information. Here, Mussolini is allegedly interested in control of Majorca, a group of islands off of Spain’s eastern coast, located in a strategic position in relation to England’s route to India and indicative of Italian territorial and colonial aspirations; Hitler is dependent on Spain’s raw materials—iron, mercury, copper, lead, manganese, tin, and tungsten—which is expressed through a graphic entitled “German Self-Sufficiency” that shows the disparity between Germany’s domestic supply of desired goods and their demand. An image of Hitler standing erect appears at the farthest left edge of the page. The image seems to capture him in mid-sentence, with the index finger of his right hand pointing emphatically downward, as if making a point. The image is cropped to contour the lower half of his arm so that his index finger points to the block of multiple newspaper clippings overlapping one another that extends from the bottom of the page up to his waist. The close cropping of Hitler’s hand lends it a heightened sense of its dimensionality, and by arranging the newspaper clippings to lie beneath Hitler’s hand, it appears as if Hitler is pointing to a headline that reads: “Schacht Sees an Explosion if Reich Gets No Colonies: Warns Peace Will Be Shaken Unless World Ceases to Try to ‘Shrink’ German People—Silent on Four-Year Plan in Speech.” Here the image is used to emphasize the representation of Hitler as a three-dimensional subject whose actions are, in turn, represented in two-dimensional newsprint. Through

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the use of cropping and overlapping, *Photo-History* uses the image of Hitler to not only illustrate the news reported in the newspaper headlines—like a typical portrait—but emphasized the image’s relationship to real world events.

The next coupled pages illustrate the “Officers’ Rebellion,” noting the direction of the Nationalist offensive with images and a map of the intended plan of attack for July 18, 1936, with all paths converging for an assault on Madrid. (Fig. 33) Of note is an image of at least ten indiscriminate dead bodies strewn across the ground. (Fig. 34) Presumably casualties of the rebellion but not identified as Nationalist or Republican, the image is made all the more shocking by its lack of explanation or contextualization. Either the dead are officers, killed by Republicans for their act of rebellion, or Republicans, killed by Nationalists in the violence that ensued after their attempted *coup d’etat*. The dead are not valorized or glorified in their sacrifice or bravery, but instead appear only as inanimate piles of their former selves. The image is disturbing and difficult to process. It is cropped so that the image is three times as wide as it is tall, suggesting an endless landscape of dead bodies extending beyond the frame; the bodies litter the landscape, but the intentional framing and cropping of the image don’t allow the viewer the comfort of seeing a point where the bodies begin to appear in lesser frequency or stop appearing at all. Perhaps the image is meant to evoke the senselessness of the killing, but *Photo-History*’s lack of guidance for the viewer alternately evokes the full power of the image while not giving it sufficient contextual background to use the image to make a point concerning the omnipresence of death or the indiscriminate methods of killing.

The next six pages focus on the Republican defensive efforts and the Republican public supporters, including notable public figures like Fernando de los Ríos, the Spanish
Ambassador to the United States, and the Spanish navy and air force. Although ill-equipped as an army, *Photo-History* shows the Spanish people rallying together a defense—if not with proper artillery and barricades then with whatever they have available. In one of the few text blocks accompanying these images is an optimistic account of the challenges posed to the Nationalists’ rebellion:

The treacherous officers had planned to overthrow a Government. … Instead they were confronted with the task of overthrowing a people. From the farms of Andalusia and Estremadura, from the mines of Asturias and Murcia, from the factories and offices of Catalonia and New Castile, peasants, workers, professionals, and priests faithful to their trust, rallied to save their newly won freedom. Confident and united, in town after town, in province after province, they smothered the rebellious garrisons. The Spanish people demonstrated to the world their ability to defend democracy.

While not necessarily inaccurate, the statement presents a broadly generalized account of the first few weeks of the war; it creates an illusion of consensus in describing the Nationalists’ facing the “task of overthrowing a people,” and implies a consciousness on behalf of the Spanish people in demonstrating “to the world their ability to defend democracy.” Despite large numbers of human casualties on the Republican side during the first months of the rebellion, none are pictorially or verbally represented here. Images show the activities of people rallying together, at times singling out individuals—a man dressed in plainclothes poised to throw a rock at an unpictured target, another of a man smiling while mounted on a white donkey and proudly brandishing a rifle—or expressing widespread popular support by depicting a huge crowd raising their arms and rifles in solidarity, printed in great enough detail to discern individual smiles on innumerable faces. The angle is unabashedly positive, showing the incredible determination of the Republican defensive without outlining their horrible losses or adverse conditions.
As if to curtail the optimism inspired in the reader by the continued perseverance of the Republican “heroes,” a two-page spread follows that begins on one page with the words “THE REBELLION CRUSHED” and continues on the next with “… AND THEN REVIVED!” The images are stark and the juxtaposition seems almost cruel in so coolly representing such a severe change in fortune of the magazine’s Republican protagonists. (Fig. 35) The images, perhaps the most frightening in the whole magazine, show the surrender of a group of “rebellious officers” in Madrid, foreign-financed airplanes, missiles, and tanks, and negative images of men wearing goggles and masks. Three of the images, cropped and pasted together in a difficult to decipher montage, appear to have been enlarged as negatives, so the darks and lights of the original scene are switched in the image. One of the men sits at the helm of a tank, where he looks more like an alien than a soldier; his eyes are shielded by large buggish goggles and either he wears a mask or the detail of his face has been washed out in the image. Another man, also in goggles and a mask, stands atop a podium-like structure and consults something resembling a control panel. The contour of his body is outlined in black and significantly elongated around his head, creating the illusion of a shadow that situates the viewer well below the subject, as if looking up at him in reverence or defeat. The images are otherworldly and their subjects seemingly nonhuman, perhaps suggesting the alternative reality experienced by the soldier. Furthermore, the negative-printed images represent a complete departure from the aesthetic photographic realism embodied elsewhere in the magazine, and which stylistically served to support the claims of journalistic objectivity championed by other American picture magazines.

After focusing on the brutality of the Nationalist offensive in the revived rebellion for four pages, *Photo-History* included a two-page spread about two-thirds of the
way through the magazine with almost exclusively written editorial content. While neither editorial was written specifically for use in *Photo-History*, both provide an alternative and persuasive argument for the Republican cause. The first is a letter written by British screenwriter Ivan Montagu and is titled “Heroes of the Alcazar, An Open Letter to Darryl Zanuck.” In his letter to Zanuck, an American movie producer whom Montagu heard was preparing “for immediate production” of a film on the siege of the Alcazar, Montagu emphatically supports Zanuck’s commission but writes him with the explicit purpose of affirming that Zanuck understands the genuine heroism of the Republican defenders of the Alcazar while also noting the atrocities committed by the “cadets” of the Nationalist faction. The letter, originally published in *New Theatre and Film* in March of 1937, also sardonically concerns itself with the necessary “personal bit” of the film and what selected scenes of the actual events (of abducting women, no less) may or may not make a “good shot.” Ultimately, the letter ends on a bitter note—citing the absence of a “happy ending” for the narrative of a world event that didn’t unfold as it might have in the movies—and poses a challenge to Zanuck to make an “authentic” film.

The second editorial in the spread, is an anecdote condensed from “The Living Age” by Readers Digest, by Robert Westerby and entitled “Death of a Militiaman.” The story recounts the systematic murder of thirty *milicianos* with the use of the so-called “new gun,” a weapon that can “kill the whole thirty of them in a second or two.” The story’s protagonist is Felipe, a sixteen-year-old soldier, who meets his death in front of a firing squad after only four weeks of fighting for the Republican cause. The narrative is brief but powerful, and provides an alternative form of discourse to accompany the images printed in the magazine.
In *Photo-History*, the Republican “Loyalists” are always portrayed in a favorable light, even in the face of death or glaring defeat. On the same page that houses a newspaper clipping dated August 8 appears a *Photo-History* headline that reads “Peoples’ Militia Falls Back Courageously.” Three dynamic and certainly novel action shots are located on the opposing page, framing a series of paragraphs that defend the Republicans’ military deficiencies (*Fig. 36*):

The People’s Militia lacked a general staff, trained officers, and an organized service of supplies. Each political party adhering to the People’s Front had its own military units in the field. Often they acted independently of one another.

In addition to all this, their improvised equipment and ancient rifles were no match for Franco’s imported precision instruments. Amateurs in military organization, they rushed with foolhardy courage to meet professional killers. Retreating, but never defeated, the people’s militia fell back in a series of uneven encounters.

Without a doubt, the Republican defensive was extraordinary, and it serves *Photo-History*’s larger mission well to reiterate this point. The unlikely and immediate rebuttal of the Republicans against their better trained and equipped aggressors is a fact of the war that is well summarized here in words and well-illustrated in images. *Photo-History*’s use of action shots here serves to reestablish a sense of the objective truth of the photograph, since at least two of the images look like they were taken at the considerable personal risk of the photographer.

The last third of *Photo-History: 1* is almost entirely devoted to the Republican defense of Madrid in November 1936, certainly the reigning capstone of the Spanish Civil War by March 1937. The images of the destruction and carnage of Madrid are some of the most arresting and affecting of all the images that emerged from the war, and *Photo-History* exhibits the full spectrum—from apocalyptic shots of threadbare buildings standing awkwardly on city streets to the deaths of civilian men, women, and
children (some of the most grisly images taken at the morgue), to the hordes of displaced peoples preparing to traverse great distances to get out of the city and with luck, out of the line of fire. The “city” depicted here is distant and hardly recognizable from the establishing shots at the beginning of Photo-History: 1, but the point of comparison is a meaningful and undoubtedly calculated one. The pages bear menacing headlines like “At the Gates of Madrid” and “Dark Days in Madrid,” or simply, “Terror…” and show images that indicate the suffering of nearly every conceivable demographic that might subsist in a European capital city. The suffering shown here serves as a summation of war—the images seem to strive for a comprehensive look into all the horror that could feasibly be realized in one specific place at one specific time. These images, within the context of Photo-History, serve an objective that Susan Sontag might qualify as a “species of rhetoric” in that they reiterate, simplify, and agitate, and they “create the illusion of consensus,”242 which had consistently served as the mission and simplifying principle guiding Photo-History’s depiction of the Spanish Civil War.

III. Which way Spain?

Photo-History presented a more thorough report on the events of the first eight months of the Spanish Civil War than any other picture magazine, yet this report was by no means strictly objective, relying on sensationalist techniques to construct a compelling and dramatic narrative of the war. Photo-History belays the events of the war in a series of cyclical victories and defeats for the Republican faction, accelerating and dramatizing the give-and-take of the war. The high optimism of the February 1936 Popular Front election is established and explored only to be crushed by the reality of the July 18

242 Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others, 96.
rebellion; the depiction of the actors and incentives of the rebellion seem petty and inexplicable when viewed in contrast to the everyday Spaniards dropping everything to defend their Republic with neither sufficient arms nor training. The injustice of the Nationalist offensive is mined and explored so as to frustrate and upset the reader until the reader cannot help but feel somewhat elated upon coming to the coverage of the hodge-podge army precariously thrown together by the Republican underdogs. The rebellion is crushed and then revived, the Nationalists relentlessly attack Madrid but the Republicans valiantly refuse to surrender.

The cycle of extreme highs and lows repeats itself three times before settling, exhausted, on the understated optimism for the Republican cause, if not explicitly for their eventual success. With headlines like “The People’s Army Mobilizes,” “Help From Foreign Democracy,” and “The Miracle of Madrid,” Photo-History softens its editorial hand and makes the war almost palatable to the reader—while it inflated the dramatic outcomes up until this moment (that is, until today—the day the reader picks up the magazine), it concludes with headlines that read “That the Government of the People Shall Not Perish,” and ultimately, as if truly expecting an answer: “Which Way Spain?”
Conclusion

The Spanish Civil War ended in April of 1939 and by September, the Second World War began with the formal declarations of war by Germany and France. *Life*’s subsequent coverage would provide some of the most telling and dramatic photographs of the entire war and cement its position as a “war magazine”\(^{243}\) for the American public.

Throughout its 36 years of weekly production, *Life* magazine was instrumental in codifying the visual aspects of the news and influential in establishing the prevalence of the image in the media, advertising, education, and politics. Over the course of its coverage of the Spanish Civil War, *Life* magazine developed a graphic and textual style that allowed the visually distressing images of war a unique editorial space, and encouraged readers not only to study the images, but also to try and learn from them. *Life* celebrated the photographs of war it printed, imploring the reader to grasp them for what they stood for, while the magazine capitalized on their marketability.

*Photo-History*, on the other hand, was adamant in its assertions and flamboyant in its execution. It held firm that World War was imminent, and expressed that the United States could no more ignore it than it could remain neutral. As *Photo-History* argued, even in ignorance, sides were taken—mirroring an argument made by many supporters of the Spanish Republic during the war who claimed that by not intervening on behalf of the Republican forces in Spain, the Nationalist insurgency was generously privileged by default. Without the more thorough and transparent analysis of the *New York Times* or the consistent coverage of a news magazine like *Time* or *Newsweek*, *Photo-History*’s format

\(^{243}\) See Henry Luce’s comment, p. 50.
allowed only one opportunity to encompass the essence of pressing current events and
did so with bravado. With its purported depiction of “forces lying behind today’s news
events,” Photo-History aimed to evoke powerful emotional responses in the reader, and
ultimately, to provoke them to action. Although some of the outcomes of individual
battles in the Spanish Civil War were, in fact, very dramatic, Photo-History’s use of visual,
textual, and graphic components combined to create a forceful, if incredibly one-sided,
account of the war up until March of 1937. The images were rarely addressed directly by
the written content, leaving the reader to draw his or her own narrative from the images
and headlines provided. Photo-History’s layout style varied so drastically that the role of
the magazine’s editorial staff in constructing the narrative was far more pronounced than
the potential objective truth offered by the images.

The atrocities of the Spanish Civil War were quickly eclipsed by media outlets
reporting the breaking news of World War II, but it is not a war that has faded easily
from view. In Spain, Franco’s dictatorship lasted until his death in 1975, nearly forty
years after the Spanish Civil War came to a close, and until that point the Spanish Civil
War was not discussed openly or honestly by the Spanish press or general public. Indeed,
the history of the war itself had been re-written by Franco’s regime, imposing its
revisionist narrative of the war upon the post-war generation of Spanish citizens. Spanish
exiles, seeking to write an alternative account of events, wrote without the benefit of
archives. According to Gabriel Jackson, no one—from those writing personal memoirs
to professional historians—was granted full access to the relevant primary documents
necessary to legitimize a challenge to Franco’s monolithic control of the Spanish Civil
War’s written history.244

However, images of the Spanish Civil War were far more difficult to suppress. Images that had been made public during the war remained so, but were often deployed in different contexts, with their meaning and intended audience significantly altered. In contrast to the discursive nature of written texts or verbal communication, photographs are largely descriptive; they thus served to reinforce the memories of many Spaniards (regardless of which side they fought for) that written texts sought to counter.

Although the Spanish Civil War came to a close almost 70 years ago, its cultural resonance is still profound. In recent years, the Spanish Civil War has been explored as a motif for creative production and reexamination, from Guillermo del Toro’s stunning film *Pan’s Labyrinth* to recent exhibitions on the photographs of Robert Capa and Gerda Taro at the International Center for Photography to “Shadows of War,” a computer game released last November that allowed players to choose Nationalist or Republican avatars to fight in crucial battles of the war and perhaps change the ultimate outcome. The Spanish Civil War would not have endured to the same degree that it has as a trope of modern culture had it not been for the role that photography played in making individual events and faces of the war known to a global audience. The Spanish Civil War is viewed in retrospect as the “last great romantic war, a place for young men and women across Europe to act on their idealism,” and the most widely reproduced images of the war generally reflect that sentiment.

The American picture magazine played a pivotal role in the formation of a “visual language” that codified ways of viewing images and by which viewers came to picture and interpret the social worlds around them. In the late 1930s, the sizes and qualifications of this visual register were just being explored and the representation of photographs rarely

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taken into question. The emphasis on the accuracy of the photograph as a two-
dimensional representation of a pre-existing reality was explored by art and news
photographers alike, supported by magazines and government sponsored organizations,
and generally absorbed by the masses. In combining image and text to depict the Spanish
Civil War, the American picture magazine of the mid-1930s pioneered a new and
experimental stage in the history of photojournalism, marking indelibly the visual
representations of future world conflicts.
And The Spaniards

Just as Madrid seemed ready to fall to the Spanish rebels, each popular and pro-Government force was reinforced by two grim columns. On Nov. 19, Celafo, from the Guadarrama Mountain passes where they had stood off Hitler for four months, they were led by General Gama, and Falco, both instead Army old-timers. But the latter, after four years of Madrid, fell for the first time. General Galán left the front for a few hours to see his dying wife, killed by a rebel shrapnel, then returned to his job.

The wealth of the Spanish people has long been concentrated in Catalonia and its great city, Barcelona, whose Anarchist General Llurba (left) led a Catalan column to Madrid's rescue. In Barcelona's two principal squares General Garcia has raised a well-armed column of militiamen. Picture of pretty girls in sombreros gives the Spanish Government its most successful propaganda. But in grimness too, the trenches around Madrid have been jabed high with the bodies of brave, if hooky, Spanish women killed in action.

Fig. 2. "Camera Overseas," "And The Spaniards." (Life, Volume I, No. 1, November 23, 1936, page 57).
Fig. 3. “Speaking of Pictures….,” “…This is a brain operation.” (LIFE, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 30, 1936, p. 2-3).

Fig. 5. “And The Spaniards.” (*Life*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 7, 1936, p. 59), detail.
Fig. 7. “The Camera Overseas (continued),” “The Spanish Bomb Madrid.” (*Life*, Volume 1, No. 5, December 21, 1936, p. 56-7).
Fig. 8. “The Spanish Bomb Madrid.” (Life, Vol. 1, No. 5, December 21, 1936, p. 57), detail.
Fig. 9. “The Camera Overseas (continued),” “...and the Spanish.” (Life, Vol. 1, No. 6, December 28, 1936, p. 58-9).
Fig. 10. “A Munitions Ship on its Way to Spain Outruns Congress and the Coast Guard.” (*Life*, Vol. 2, No. 3, January 18, 1937, p. 16-7).

Fig. 13. "Bilbao Bombardment (continued); This little Basque boy, now safe in France, is still mortally terrified by what he went through in the Spanish Civil War." (Life, Vol. 2, No. 22, May 31, 1937, p. 70).
DEATH IN SPAIN: THE CIVIL WAR HAS TAKEN 500,000 LIVES IN ONE YEAR

On July 17 the Spanish Civil War will be one year old. In that time it has brought Death to 500,000 Spaniards, has shattered such ancient cities as Madrid, Toledo, Bilbao, Saragossa, and Durango, has kept Europe in a state of jittery. When the war started, most U.S. citizens looked on the Loyalists as a half-crazy, irresponsible, murderous sum that had turned on its honorable better. A year of war has taught the U.S. some of Spain.

The ruling classes of Spain were probably the world's worst bosses—impossible, arrogant, vain, ignorant, shortsighted and incompetent. Some 20,000 landlords owned 30% of the land. They did not give their field hands modern machinery or teach them modern irrigation. They refused to rent unposted land to landless peasants for fear of giving the peasants dangerous ideas of ownership. The land was only about 45% efficient and much of it was idle. And Spain's mineral resources, among the greatest in Europe, lay almost entirely unexploited. The aristocracy of Spain was still living on the interest on wealth brought home from the Americas by the gold fleets in the 16th Century.

To the 500,000 landlords, add 21,000 Army officers, more than twice the total of British Army officers. There was one officer for every six privates, one general for every 140 men. For every $6 spent on soldiers' pay, food, barracks, ammunition, officers got $40 in pay—25% of the national budget. The national law made officers semi-sacred. Just for pushing a policeman of the swank Civil Guard, six Americans got six months in jail in 1935.

Add to the 51,000 landlords and officers, 100,000 clergy, the most top-heavy Church hierarchy in the world, next to Tibet. These also were paid by the State. The Church, with its enormous wealth, naturally took a capitalist's position. It was up to its neck in politics. Peasants were told that to vote against the Conservatives was usually a mortal sin. The Church was in charge of Spanish education. Result: the Spanish people were 47% illiterate. The reason for the civil war was simply that the people of Spain had fired their bosses for flagrant incompetence and the bosses had refused to be fired.

For a new movie of the Spanish war from the Government side, turn page.

Fig. 14. "Death in Spain: The Civil War Has Taken 500,000 Lives in One Year." (Life, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 12, 1937, p. 19).
Fig. 15. “Death in Spain: The Civil War Has Taken 500,000 Lives in One Year,” “The War in Spain Makes a Movie With Captions by Ernest Hemingway.” (Life, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 12, 1937, p. 19, 20-1).
Fig. 16. “Spanish War by Hemingway (continued),” “How it all started in July, 1936.” (Life, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 12, 1937, p. 22-3).

Fig. 17. “The Spanish Earth is Worth a Fight and the world’s industrialists know it.” (Life, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 12, 1937, p. 24-5).
SPANISH PROPAGANDA PICTURES APPEAL TO WORLD TO TAKE SIDES IN CIVIL WAR

Spanish Loyalists and Rebels supposedly hate one another. Their civil war has been taken up by the world’s Rightists and Leftists as a trial-by-fire of the two ideologies. Some of the pictures which both sides urge their cases are shown on these pages.

Favorite Loyalist charge against the Rebels is the destruction of Madrid. Obviously true, it has the weakness that the Loyalists brought the destruction by a military defense of Madrid.

Most controversial Rebel atrocity was the bombing of Guernica one afternoon last Spring. Loyalists claim it was an open town far behind the lines. Rebels claim it was mainly destroyed by retreating Asturians before its capture three days later. Picture No. 1 (Neutral) shows that fire burned Guernica. Picture No. 2 (Loyalist) proves that Guernica was destroyed, somehow. Picture No. 3 (Rebel) is supposed to prove that bombs did not start the fire because they would have also split the streets, whereas this Guernica street shows no bomb pits. Loyalists claimed, Oct. 15, that their pictures, proving Guernica was bombed, were stolen by the German film company asked to develop the negatives.

Fig. 18. “Spanish Propaganda Pictures Appeal to World to Take Sides in Civil War.” (Life, Vol. 3, No. 17, October 25, 1937, p. 51).
Fig. 19. “These are Propaganda Pictures from the Spanish Loyalists,” “These are Propaganda Pictures from the Spanish Rebels.” (Life, Vol. 3, No. 17, October 25, 1937, p. 52-3).
THE WORLD'S TWO WARS: TERUEL FALLS AND TSINGTAO BURNS

Once again LIFE prints grim pictures of War, well knowing that once again they will dismay and outrage thousands and thousands of readers. But today's two great continuing news events are two wars—one in China, one in Spain. On Jan. 7 the Spanish civil war reached an historic climax when the Rebel garrison of Teruel surrendered to the Loyalists, capping the greatest Loyalist victory of the war. On Dec. 18 the Chinese at Tsingtao destroyed the greatest single Japanese investment in China—the cotton mills of Tungtao.

Of course LIFE cannot ignore the appeal of these two great news events in pictures. As events, they have an authority far more potent than any editor's policy or readers' squeamishness. But LIFE could conceivably choose to show pictures of these events that make them look attractive. They are not, however, attractive events. The important thing that happens in a war fight is that one man hits another. Only a picture of a blow shows a fight. The important thing that happens in a war is that something or somebody gets destroyed. Victory comes to the side that destroys the greatest number of somethings and somethings. Pictures of war are therefore pictures of something or somebody getting destroyed. The pictures on these pages of the Spanish war were taken by one of the world's best news photographers, Robert Capa (see p. 53). But even the best pictures cannot show war in all its horror and ugliness. They may depict some of the blood, some of the broken bodies, some of the violence and destruction but they leave unrecorded the terrible will to kill, the even more terrible will to live, the long lonely pain and the utter heartbreak of a whole people. No picture can convey the sounds that come from a thousand dying men or the smells that come from a thousand dead men.

The three men above met death along the road to Saragossa, northeast of Teruel, against the backdrop of the Ebro Mountains. They knew war and their families knew war, as the peace-loving people of America do not know war. For as a nation, this country has not known the full reality of war since it surrendered at Appomattox Court House in 1865.

Americans' noble and sensible dislike of war is largely based on ignorance of what modern war really is. The trouble with that kind of cloudy idealism is that it can too easily be overthrown and converted into an active will to fight a specific “good” war. The love of peace has no meaning or no stamina unless it is based on a knowledge of war's terms. Only thus, by contrast, can the benefits and blessings of the absence of war be fully appreciated and maintained. Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them.

Fig. 20. “The World's Two Wars: Teruel Falls and Tsingtao Burns.” (LIFE, Vol. 4, No. 4, January 24, 1938, p. 9).
Fig. 21. “The World’s Two Wars, continued.” (Life, Vol. 4, No. 4, January 24, 1938, p. 10-11).
Fig. 22. "The World's Two Wars (continued)," "Spanish War draws child's blood." (Life, Vol. 4, No. 4, January 28, 1938, p. 12-13).
Fig. 23. “War Also Destroys Things: The Chinese Burn Out a $100,000,000 Japanese Investment in Tsingtao.” (Life, Vol. 4, No. 4, January 28, 1938, p. 14-15).
Fig. 24. Front cover of Photo-History, (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937).
Fig. 25. Inside front cover of Photo-History. (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpaginated]).
FOREWORD

IN 1931 the Spanish Republic was established by the people.

From 1931 to 1933 the Republican Government attempted to change the Spain of the 16th Century into the Spain of the 20th Century. It decreed the separation of Church and State and the freedom of conscience. It reformed the army. It laid plans for agricultural resettlement. It set up a public school system. It proclaimed a policy of international peace. In its constitution and laws the Republic opened the way for the establishment of all those rights of personal liberty, progressive government, and advancement in education and culture which have long been the heritage of the American People.

But the Spain of the 16th Century,—the landed aristocracy, the army, and the higher clergy,—rose in defense of their positions of special privilege and political preferment. These elements opposed the Republic with parliamentary filibustering, a deliberate campaign of agricultural and industrial sabotage, and armed assaults. They emasculated the agrarian law. They organized terrorist gangs. By means of all this they even succeeded in recapturing political power for a time. But when, in February, 1936, they saw that as long as political democracy existed in Spain the people would keep them out of office, they finally resorted to open rebellion. That rebellion began on July 18, 1936.

Already superior in arms the rebels were liberally supplied from abroad with the latest military equipment. Throwing foreign mercenary armies against their own people, they swept through the provinces until they were at the very gates of the capital. And then the world saw the miracle of Madrid. The people massed themselves in a living barricade for the defense of their liberties. They fought. And they have been fighting until the miracle of Madrid has become the miracle of Spain.

PHOTO-HISTORY: I, presents a pictorial record of the background and course of this WAR IN SPAIN.
Fig. 27. “Spain.” (*Photo-History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]).
Fig. 28. “The People… Peasants, Workers, Shopkeepers,” “Doctors, Lawyers, Teachers, were dominated by.” (*Photo-History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937).
"Even the dust on the tombstones ..." of the village of Paredes, was owned by its lord, a typical absentee. These lords were the 2% who owned 67% of the land. They wintered on the Riviera and summered in Madrid. They clinked glasses while 3,000,000 peasants asked for land ... peasants who worked 14 hours a day for 50 cents ... remained 80% illiterate—sinking into the bitter servitude of "A land without people, a people without land."

Fig. 29. “Absentee Landlords.” (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag]).
Fig. 30. “April 1931, Alfonso Departs.” (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]).
Fig. 31. “The Ballots Failed Them.” (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]).
Fig. 32. “What Mussolini Wants,” “What Hitler Wants.” (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]).
Fig. 33. “Officers’ Rebellion.” (*Photo-History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]).

Fig. 34. “Officers’ Rebellion.” (*Photo-History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]), detail.
Fig. 35. “The Rebellion Crushed,” “…And Then Revived!” (Photo-History, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1937, [unpag.]).
The People's Militia lacked a general staff, trained officers, and an organized service of supplies. Each political party adhering to the People's Front had its own military units in the field. Often they acted independently of one another.

In addition to all this, their improvised equipment and ancient rifles were no match for Franco's imported precision instruments. Amateurs in military organization, they rushed with foolhardy courage to meet professional killers, retreating, but never defeated, the people's militia fell back in a series of uneven encounters.

Driven from Coolitz by Moorish mercenaries, harried from Saville by foreign legionnaires, fighting to the death at Badajoz, swept from the Tagus River Valley and Toledo by Italian whippet tanks, this undisciplined militia fell back on Madrid.
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