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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Pamphlet: Black Americans in the Spanish People's War Against Fascism 1936-1939

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[[image]]

Remember This

I've heard you sobbing in the night
And know your tears are not for fright
But for the dead. Those Comrades lost
Who through this day have fought beside you all this way

Beneath the sun's half blinding heat,
Until they fell upon this wheat, beside these olive trees,
In all this hell sound and thirst,
The whining steel and blinding burst of bomb and shell;
They still came on.
With blistered feet and shoulders bent,
With vagrant thoughts that often went to home and peace
And we must weep. For Oliver and Jack we could not keep,
Nor can we get them back.
I cannot say that they've been torn
To some far place and there reborn to live again;
But mark you this--they still live on--as men.
For we must take the strength they leave
And to the goal they set must cleave
With ever greater unity--
"All men shall now be FREE".

I hear you sobbing in the night,
But in the day remember this
That we are they.

--William P. Smith, Jr.
Lincoln Battalion

From Volunteer for Liberty, August 9, 1937

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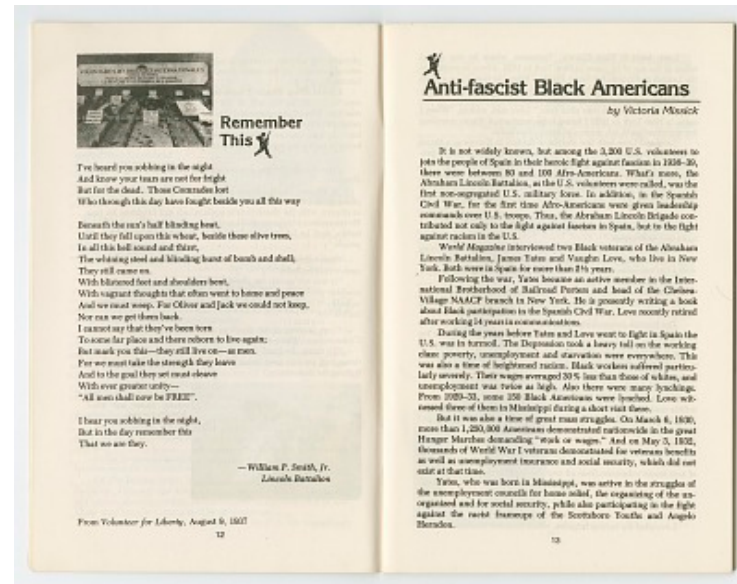
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Anti-fascist Black Americans

by Victoria Missick

It is not widely known, but among the 3,200 U. S. volunteers to join the people of Spain in their heroic fight against fascism in 1936-39, there were between 80 and 100 Afro-Americans. What's more, the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, as the U.S. volunteers were called, was the first non-segregated U.S. military force. In addition, in the Spanish Civil War, for the first time Afro-Americans were given leadership commands over U. S. troops. Thus, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade contributed not only to the fight against fascism in Spain, but to the fight against racism in the U. S.

World Magazine interviewed two Black veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, James Yates and Vaughn Love, who live in New York. Both were in Spain for more than 2 1/2 years.



Following the war, Yates became an active member in the International Brotherhood of Railroad Porters and head of the Chelsea-Village NAACP branch in New York. He is presently writing a book about Black participation in the Spanish Civil War. Love recently retired after working 14 years in communications.

During the years before Yates and Love went to fight in Spain the U. S. was in turmoil. The Depression took a heavy toll on the working class: poverty, unemployment and starvation were everywhere. This was also a time of heightened racism. Black workers suffered particularly severely. Their wages averaged 30% less than those of whites, and unemployment was twice as high. Also there were many lynchings. From 1929 - 33, some 150 Black Americans were lynched. Love witnessed three of them in Mississippi during a short visit there.

But it was also a time of great mass struggles. On March 6, 1930, more than 1,250,000 Americans demonstrated nationwide in the great Hunger Marches demanding "work or wages." And on May 3, 1932, thousands of World War I veterans demonstrated for veterans benefits as well as unemployment insurance and social security, which did not exist at that time.

Yates, who was born in Mississippi, was active in the struggles of the unemployment councils for home relief, the organizing of the unorganized and for social security, while also participating in the fight against the racist frameups of the Scottsboro Youths and Angelo Herndon.



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