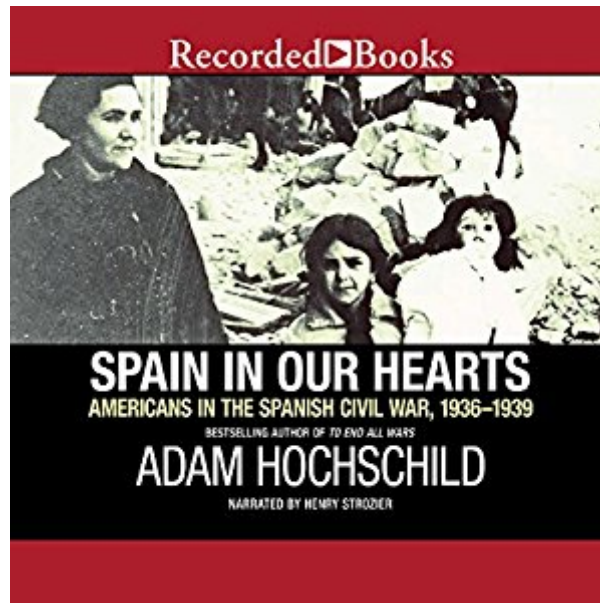




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Spain In Our Hearts: Americans In The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939



Synopsis

From acclaimed best-selling author Adam Hochschild, a sweeping history of the Spanish Civil War told through a dozen characters, including Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell: a tale of idealism, heartbreaking suffering, and a noble cause that failed. For three crucial years in the 1930s, the Spanish Civil War dominated headlines in America and around the world as volunteers flooded to Spain to help its democratic government fight off a fascist uprising led by Francisco Franco and aided by Hitler and Mussolini. Today we're accustomed to remembering the war through Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Robert Capa's photographs. But Adam Hochschild has discovered some less familiar yet far more compelling characters who reveal the full tragedy and importance of the war: a fiery 19-year-old Kentucky woman who went to wartime Spain on her honeymoon; a Swarthmore College senior who was the first American casualty in the battle for Madrid; a pair of fiercely partisan, rivalrous New York Times reporters who covered the war from opposites sides; and a swashbuckling Texas oilman with Nazi sympathies who sold Franco almost all his oil - at reduced prices and on credit. It was in many ways the opening battle of World War II, and we still have much to learn from it. *Spain in Our Hearts* is Adam Hochschild at his very best.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Spanish Civil War was so complicated in its causes, course, and aftermath that the first-time reader has a hard time grasping even the bare facts. This is the fourth or fifth history of the war I've

read, and the one I enjoyed best, since the author views the war through the history of a small part of it, the brigades of American volunteers who served with the Republicans. This more intimate focus makes a good window for someone who struggles as I have to comprehend the war. Much of the book is derived from the author's reading of first-person accounts by those same Americans, many of which I've seen nowhere else, and he frames their stories lightly with appropriate background on Spanish history and politics, as well as the scandals of the Stalinist witch-hunts which were occurring at the same time and influenced Soviet participation in the war. The subject matter, how idealistic young men and women were recruited, exploited, and ultimately betrayed, is heart-breaking. My husband and I read this on our Kindles, and periodically we'd check in with each other and agree that many episodes were very depressing indeed, but the historical figures (Lois Orr, Marion Merriman, Virginia Cowles, Eric Blair/George Orwell) come so vividly to life that I could not bear to leave the book unfinished. Additionally, he looks at two topics not usually covered in books on Spain, the shocking evidence of extensive aid (oil, tankers, espionage) offered to Franco by Texaco (!!) and the still-amazing history of the anarchist period (it can't be called a government) in Barcelona.

A story that needed to be told this well, written with a clarity of both language and intent. The narrative follows a timeline and pays respect to, without blindly fawning over the idealism of the Lincoln Brigade. At the same time, it frankly acknowledges the snakes in the garden of Stalin's international communism, though the author does not delve into its political theory or elucidate its "road to serfdom." The perfidy of Franco, of the Nationalist fascists and of their civilian, ecclesiastic and foreign supporters is on the other hand well described.

I knew very little about the Spanish Civil war. Although I had read many books about World War One and Two, I'll admit to being somewhat clueless about this war. This lack of knowledge and basic understanding of a conflict that one of my favorite writers-Ernest Hemmingway wrote extensively about, motivated me to purchase this book. I wasn't disappointed. The historical background of this war contained in the book is very illuminating. In addition the writing was very good and the story was compelling and interesting. I thought about giving it a five star rating but because I've read so many excellent books lately, I just felt that I was overwhelmed by the five star category and needed to take a deep breath and lower my standards of excellence just a bit. But in the case of this book--it was just a bit.

If you're interested in WW2, you will be interested in the Spanish Revolution. This book was a harder one to get through, lots of names and stories from the past and told in second person that tend to mush together, but the more you read, the simpler it gets. The one good thing about all these people is that each of their personalities and stories are unique enough to separate one another. It really does give a great depiction of how we were involved in this revolution - and how not involved our political powers were - and gives a sense of perspective to WW2. Such an amazing way to get into the mindset of this time and gain a greater understanding of what social revolution actually means.

Other reviews paint Hochschild as a Leftist, which certainly isn't me. And occasionally, as I read, I surmised he wasn't of my tribe. BUT--he is, subject to my one minor criticism below, a fine writer, telling a fascinating story of the practice war for WW II. And perhaps it is a story that can best be told by a Left-leaning author who might well, back in the mid-30's, have been tempted to join in the forces of right and honor. Only to discover, as did so many of those who made the arduous journey to Spain, that there is seldom a right or a wrong in a war; that the merits, if any, of one's cause are usually irrelevant if the other side has more and better arms; and that decisions by foreign powers about how much of their manpower and weaponry should be dedicated to what was happening in Spain are unlikely to take into account the needs of their proxies risking their lives there. To me, this is the real story of this horrible war--that somehow a brutal dictatorship in a backward country could become the shining light on the hill luring some otherwise intelligent people to a fight about which, they learned, they really knew nothing; and that this dream was then shattered by the reality of bullets and bombs, and the obvious indifference of the Russians to these misguided souls. How did they feel, when, having struggled to reach Spain and join the fray, it quickly became apparent that they were on the losing side, but couldn't get out of the war nearly as easily as they got in it. SO--an excellent read, with this reservation: I came to the story with little knowledge of the Spanish revolution.. I learned that there were "Republicans," and there were "Nationalists,." To my constant confusion, the Nationalists, whom I kept thinking must be the government folk, were the revolutionaries, and they were basically proxies for Germany and Italy. The Republicans, on the other hand, were the forces of the government, but, again to my surprise, they were the darlings of the left and of the Russians. That's tough enough, but Hochschild wasn't able to find a single word that always meant "government) or "revolutionary"--I had to keep remembering the various names by which each was called. Which if, as they, is the worst I can offer, that really isn't too bad. And it wasn't, but it made the reading a little bumpier for me. Otherwise I was thoroughly pleased with the

book.AMD, subject to that one nittlint comment5, I felt the fook was a reaqilly worthwhile read. I learned a lolt, not jus aout the specifics of this Warl but the horrors of all wars for those fighting them, especially when it suddenly appears to warriors on one side or the other than they are going to down in defeat.

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