

MUSIC

Anderson birthday celebrated

Black singers in tribute to the woman who opened the door for them.

Contralto Marian Anderson—“America’s First Lady of Song”—was 75 years old on Feb. 17.

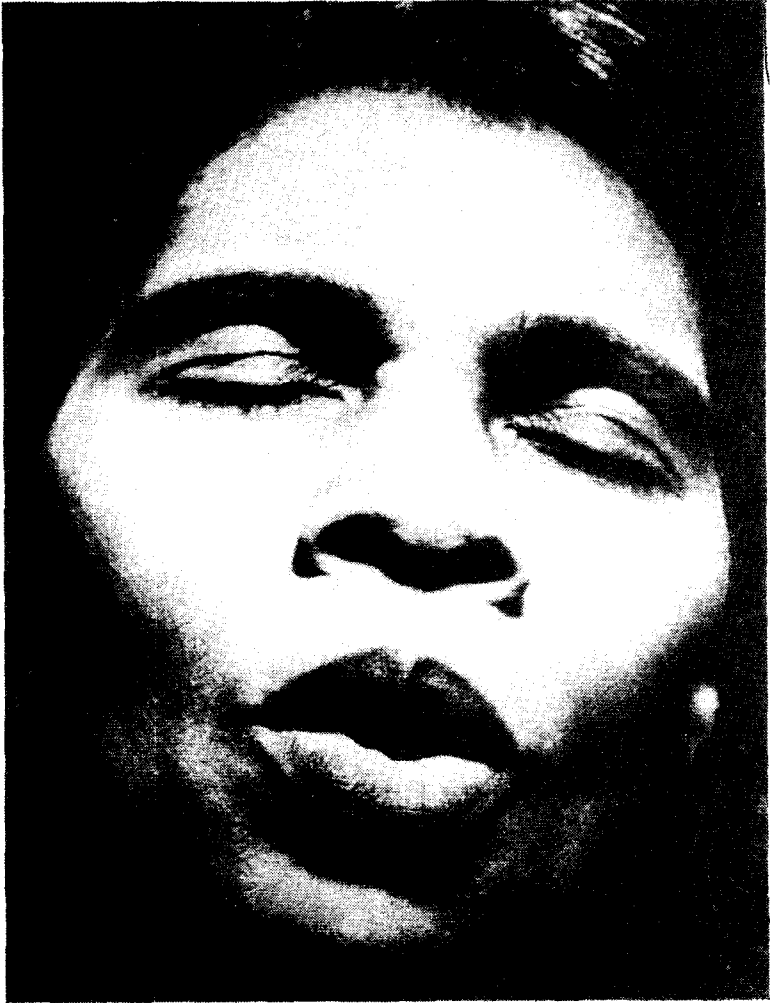
Ten days later the event will be celebrated in a Carnegie Hall concert. Other great black women singers, including Leontyne Price, will be on the program, acknowledging the debt they and their audiences owe to the woman who opened the door through which they passed to fulfill their musical potential.

The opening of the door was a dramatic event, the details of which have faded from the public memory. But in the atmosphere of a nation on the brink of a war against Hitler, the concert Marian Anderson sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Easter, 1939, had far-reaching consequences as a blow against Jim Crow in the capitol city.

Anderson was 38 years old, a great star in Russia, Sweden, and other European musical centers, but comparatively unknown in her own country. She had been invited to sing in the Howard University concert series, and application had been made to rent Constitution Hall for the occasion.

Constitution Hall was (and is) headquarters for the Daughters of the American Revolution. At that time there was a clause in the regular rental contract for the main auditorium prohibiting the appearance of any black artist. This was not unique at the time. (Blacks could not be seated with whites on the main floor of Washington theaters or restaurants.) But there was a special irony in the case of an organization whose members were descended from men who fought for American independence. Thousands of black soldiers had fought in the Revolution, and it was possible—as some journalist pointed out—that Marion Anderson’s forebears were among them.

The trustees of Howard took their story to the press, hoping for pressure that might persuade the D.A.R. governing board to



America’s “first Lady of Song.”

change its policy. A few days later, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote in a column, syndicated in dailies all over the country, that she was resigning “from an organization in which I can do no active work,” because to remain a member “implies approval of [their] action.”

Other distinguished women resigned from the D.A.R. Some local chapters voted to invite Anderson to sing for them. Others petitioned for a reversal of the ban. But the governing board was not moved.

Meanwhile the trustees of Howard had applied for the use of the auditorium of white Central High. This was refused on the same grounds. (Washington schools were strictly segregated.) When the student editor of Cen-

tral High’s newspaper wrote a protest editorial, the administration suppressed the entire edition—except for one copy, which was read at the climax of a large public meeting, attended by many members of the New Deal and leaders of the black community.

Under the chairmanship of Oscar Chapman, Undersecretary of the Interior, resolutions were passed urging the D.C. Board of Education to permit the use of the school auditorium and asking Congress to investigate the suppression of student opinion. Tremendous publicity was generated, but no response from the Board of Education.

The President and Mrs. Roosevelt invited Marian Anderson to sing at the White House on the occasion of a visit by the King

and Queen of England—a break of precedent at least as important as what was being asked of the D.A.R. No response from the governing board.

At this point, the “curmudgeon” of the Cabinet, Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, announced that he had invited Anderson to sing a free public concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Easter morning.

It was a cold, threatening April day, but a crowd estimated at more than 75,000 assembled on the Mall. The platform was occupied by dignitaries from the government, the heads of the two labor federations, religious leaders, newspaper publishers, the Mayor of New York City, a Polish-born symphony conductor, a famous actress whose father was a segregationist senator from Alabama, and a Supreme Court Justice who had once been a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

There was no accurate way of estimating the radio audience, but it is conservative to guess that millions of Americans heard that concert. (Portions of it will be rebroadcast this Feb. 25, over National Public Radio stations.)

Marian Anderson’s prestige in her own country sky-rocketed after that. It was she who broke the color bar at the Met when she sang the role of Ulrica in *The Masked Ball*. She was sent around the world on a concert tour sponsored by the U.S. State Department. She sat as part of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations. In the years since 1939 she has sung at least two charity concerts in Constitution Hall.

Never a militant, Anderson’s considerable contribution to the struggle for civil rights has been made for the most part by her superb musicianship and in part by her great personal dignity.

—Janet Stevenson

Janet Stevenson is the author of a biography for young readers, *Marion Anderson: Singing to the World*.

CHILDREN’S CORNER

Electric Company

I think it is a good show because it teaches younger kids how to read and because of how funny it is. I learned lots of words from the *Electric Company*, such as growl, beautiful, skinny and fat. Remember, I learned those words when I was five years old. They have this real silly dance about punctuation but it’s good for teaching kids punctuation.

I think it’s the first best show on Channel 11 of learning how to read. I think that lots of people even over 60 years old can’t read and that they should watch the show. Sometimes even younger. It might not teach them everything about reading (but at least most). Even my mother likes the show and laughs at the skits because sometimes it’s funny. And my brother who is 4 is learning a few words from the show like “No.” Hope you learn how to read!

Zoom

It’s not the best show in the world. They don’t do many recipes and in one group of *Zoom*, there are only two girls. My favorite part on *Zoom* is “Zoom play of the Week.” And lots of times, the stories. A boy named Red, in *Zoom*, broke his toe. But it healed in two days. But the best thing about *Zoom* is the friendship. I mean, they’re always playing and being together. They don’t dance as great as the Mickey Mouse Club—but I’d say they would come in 2nd. They usually do plays, active things, and send in *Zoom* cards to teach kids arts and crafts. But it is a very good show for people who really enjoy arts and crafts. I still like it. Hope you do too.

—Esme Raji Codell
Age 8

Esme Raji Codell hopes to be a sports writer.

DO YOU HAVE 10 FRIENDS



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1.



2.

1. Frank Feingersh, Bill Bois, James Yates and Joe Drill returning home after fighting in Spain. 2. Lincoln Brigaders moving up.

Lincoln Brigade's fight against fascism

By Arthur H. Landis

There is no paradox in American military history to equal the phenomenon of that body of men and women who chose to call themselves the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and to fight for the Spanish Republic in the civil war of 1936-1939.

They generally abhorred war and considered all armies to be anti-life, a debasement of the human condition. Still, and herein lies the paradox, they committed themselves to a struggle more demanding than any suffered by American fighting units since the desperate years of the American Revolution.

Why would men who were opposed to war, who would greet a salute with derisive laughter, who had not the slightest qualm in telling their officers to "go screw yourself" if they thought the expression appropriate; why would men who, had they come of age in the 1960s, would have demonstrated in Washington, raised hell on every campus, and fought against the war in Vietnam with every fibre of their being—why did they do what they did?

They served as shock troops in seven of the greatest battles of the Spanish War. Eleven of the 12 commanders of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion (one of the four battalions of the 15th International Lincoln Brigade), were casualties. Seven were killed; four more wounded so badly as to be unfit for further service.

The Lincoln cadres—many with copies of Paine, Thoreau and Lenin in their pockets—suffered similarly. Of the approximately 3,400 volunteers, most were wounded one or more times; over 1,600 were killed in action.

Their shallow graves—when there was time for graves—still seed battlefields whose names once captured the hearts and headlines of the world: Madrid! Jarama! Brunete! Zaragossa! Teruel! the immortal Ebro!

Which answers the question.

For besides defending the government of Spain's Popular Front, they saw the conflict as that rare place in time and history where a catastrophe—World War II—a holocaust the like of which the world could only guess at then—might be averted or reversed.

After years of a struggle that cost one million dead, the policies of appeasement and worse of the Western world prevailed. Six months after Munich and the surrender of Czechoslovakia to Hitler, with only a trickle of Soviet arms to survive the thousand miles of submarine infested waters, the Spanish Republic was dying.

The Lincolns were pledged to fight to the end, as were all "Internationalists." The government, reflecting a humanism that refused to allow the remnants of the group that had given so generously of their blood and lives to be led to the final

LIFE IN THE U.S.

The climate for such a crusade was there. No other cause had evoked such an emotional and spiritual sense of urgency for personal participation. Spain's embassy in Washington reported 300,000 applicants to fight in the first three months of the war.

slaughter, released them—to be repatriated by the League of Nations.

On the eve of the death of the Spanish Republic, a morose American President stated bluntly to Claude G. Bowers, U.S. Ambassador to Spain "We have made a mistake; you have been right all along."

Had Franklin Roosevelt taken Bowers' advice: to "send arms to Spain," the Spanish tragedy would have ended differently. Indeed, all of subsequent history would have been different. There had been that possibility. Such men as Henry L. Stimson, Sumner Welles, Senators Pittman and Nye, and many others spoke up, too late, against "that frightful error in American foreign policy."

Within four days of F.D.R.'s remarks, Italian and Moorish divisions drove through Madrid's Toledo Gate. Within five short months, World War II, the catastrophe that the Lincolns had fought and died to prevent, was unleashed upon the world.

From whence came the men of the Lincoln Brigade? The answer is simple: from the "other" America, the anti-fascist 76 percent of the American people who solidly supported the Spanish Republic. The key word was anti-fascist (the Lincolns had so described themselves in the Spanish military ID books: "Philip Detoro: Anti-fascist; Joseph Gordon: Anti-fascist.") That was the catalyst that allowed Socialists, Communists, members of the I.W.W. and non-party students, workers, and seamen to find unity in action, without which they could not have done what they did. The concept is not alien. The essence of fascism: the denial of freedom, civil liberties, and human rights, has been with mankind since the first stones of the pyramids.

The Bill of Rights as a document is anti-fascist, as is the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. The Lincoln Brigaders had simply defined this quite basic phenomenon of the American spirit, gave it its proper name—and passed it on as a part of their heritage.

But anti-fascism too must be organized to be effective. In this respect the apparatus created to do the job was under the

auspices of the Spanish Government (funding), and the American Communist Party (personnel). The role of the American CP was second to none in leadership, solidarity, and sacrifice for the Spanish Republic. Without its efforts the Lincoln Brigade, as we know it, could not have existed, though many volunteers would still have made it on their own as did hundreds of Europeans in the cataclysmic, first weeks of the war.

The climate for such a crusade was there. Emotionally and spiritually there had been no cause to evoke such a sense of urgency—a need for personal participation. Spain's Embassy in Washington reported a fantastic number of American applicants to fight for the Republic—as many as 300,000 in the first three months of the war.

In effect, what must be recognized is that the volunteers themselves were the product of no single tendency. Indeed, they but reflected the logic of the ongoing American Revolution. In the mold of their Calvinist, Quaker, Grange, Knights of Labor, anti-slavery, and Socialist fathers before them, they had faced up to the social crises of their times.

Over a thousand Lincoln survivors joined the American armed forces for World War II, the anti-fascist war. They fought on every battlefield. Leyte. Anzio. Omaha Beach. The Ardenne. Their casualties were again heavy: over four hundred. And they returned to face an American power elite that had opted to take the place of Italy and Germany in the maintenance of Spanish fascism...

Across the ensuing decades of Franco's tyranny the cause of the Spanish people has been held high by the Brigaders. The great majority of these, in this last period, had no CP affiliation. Still, the other America, the Rockefellers, McCarthys, Nixons, and Fords, subjected them to the inquisition of the Subversive Activities Control Board.

The Lincoln Vets fought back, refusing to accept the designation of a "Communist front organization." Across the years they led the fight to sever relations with the Franco regime; to prevent Franco's

American-sponsored entry into the U.N., to withdraw American bases from Spain, and to reject the underwriting of Spanish fascism with billions of U.S. tax dollars. They fought, too, to save those inside Spain under sentence of death; to give aid to the families of prisoners; to initiate continuing campaigns for amnesty.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in 1965, threw out the case against the Vets—for lack of evidence. Thirty years of harassment; thirty years of battle.

Four decades have passed since that dark hour of betrayal and bitter defeat when the defenders of the Republic went to the sea-coast for the ships that weren't there; to the mountains for whatever short lease on life their protection would afford; to their villages—to await the arrival of the executioners.

The "long night" has come to an end. Fascism is dead, irrevocably. In Spain the new and "visible" rights are no gratuities either. Indeed, they have been seized, literally, by Spain's people, in the streets, factories, fields—and in the publishing houses. The Juan Carlos regime in fact can but legalize the acts already consummated. And that too is an irrevocable reality!

Returning Lincoln Vets, gray-haired, but with a certain sparkle to their eye, need but mention who they are to attract the plaudits of a crowd in any village, bar or plaza. Some were able to speak to underground youth groups as early as 1972. That same year a film was made in Spain by Abe Osheroff. The *Guardia Civil* deported his cameraman. But a few months ago that film, *Dreams and Nightmares*, was shown to crowds in Barcelona and Madrid with Osheroff, as a "Lincoln Vet," addressing the crowds.

And so the two Americas are again represented in Spain. Photographs of "Ike" and Kissinger and Nixon, in cozy rapport with *El Caudillo* are still fresh in the memory of Spaniards, as is their awareness that the U.S., through its embassy and its ubiquitous CIA, has been the prime instrument of their own suppression.

The one America, as represented by the men of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, is loved.

The other is not.

And so it is in America itself...

Arthur H. Landis, a Lincoln vet, is the author of *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade and Spain, the Unfinished Revolution*.

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