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Period \_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: 1936-1939

In 1936, Spain plunged into civil war. Although the Spanish Civil War was a local struggle, it soon drew other European powers into the fighting.

### **From Monarchy to Republic**

In the 1920s, Spain was a monarchy dominated by a landowning upper class, the Catholic Church, and the military. Most Spaniards were poor peasants or urban workers. Spain had been socially and politically organized in this way for centuries. In 1931, popular unrest against the old order forced King Alfonso XIII\* to leave Spain. A republic was set up with a new, more liberal constitution.

The republican government passed a series of controversial reforms. It took over some Church lands and ended Church control of education. It redistributed some land to the peasants, gave women the vote, and ended some privileges of the old ruling class. Spanish public opinion was divided. Leftists demanded more radical reforms. Conservatives, who were backed by the military, rejected change. Although most Spaniards wanted a peaceful democracy, clashes between leftists and rightists created chaos.

### **Nationalists vs. Loyalists**

In 1936, a conservative general named Francisco Franco led a revolt that touched off a bloody civil war. Fascists and supporters of right wing policies rallied to the banner of Franco's forces, called Nationalists. Supporters of the republic, known as Loyalists, included communists, socialists, and supporters of democracy.

Hitler and Mussolini sent arms and forces to help Franco. Close to 37,000 volunteers from Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, and the western democracies joined the International Brigades and fought alongside the Loyalists against fascism. The governments of Britain, France, and the United States, however, remained neutral.

### **A Dress Rehearsal**

Both sides committed horrible atrocities. The ruinous struggle took almost one million lives. One of the worst horrors was a German air raid on Guernica, a small Spanish market town that lacked any military value. One April morning in 1937, German bombers streaked over the market square. They dropped their load of bombs and then swooped low to machine-gun anyone in the streets who had survived the first attack. An estimated 1,600 innocent people were killed.

To Nazi leaders, the attack on Guernica was an "experiment" to identify what their new planes could do. To the world, it was a grim warning of the destructive power of modern warfare.

By 1939, Franco had triumphed. Once in power, he created a fascist dictatorship like those of Hitler and Mussolini. He rolled back earlier reforms, killed or jailed enemies, and used terror to promote order.

Source: Ellis and Esler, *World History: Connections to Today*. 2003. Prentice Hall.

\* King Alfonso XIII was of the House of Bourbon, a large European royal family that had been in power since the 1500s in France and Spain. Other famous Bourbons include Louis XIV and Louis XVI of France.

**Questions:**

- 1.) What caused the initial revolt in Spain in the 1920s that unseated King Alfonso XIII?
- 2.) Who were the Nationalists? What did they want?
- 3.) Who were the Loyalists? What did they want?
- 4.) Why did Mussolini and Hitler want to help Francisco Franco?
- 5.) Why do you think a small non-important town like Guernica was chosen as a target?
- 6.) What was significant to Hitler and Mussolini about Guernica?
- 7.) What was significant to the rest of the world about Guernica?
- 8.) What style of art is Picasso's *Guernica*? (i.e. Cubist, Surreal, Abstract, Dada, etc?)
- 9.) What various images do you see of human suffering in the painting?
- 10.) What were Picasso's motives for painting *Guernica* in the way he did?

## NEWS REPORT BY GEORGE STEER FOR THE THE TIMES ABOUT GUERNICA 1937

This article by George Steer of The Times brought to the world news of the massacre by German fighters of more than 1,000 civilians in the Basque town. The outrage inspired Pablo Picasso's masterpiece, and Steer has now been honoured for the piece.

### THE TRAGEDY OF GUERNICA

#### TOWN DESTROYED IN AIR ATTACK

#### EYE-WITNESS'S ACCOUNT

From Our Special Correspondent

BILBAO, April 27 1937

Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basques and the centre of their cultural tradition, was completely destroyed yesterday afternoon by insurgent air raiders. The bombardment of this open town far behind the lines occupied precisely three hours and a quarter, during which a powerful fleet of aeroplanes consisting of three German types, Junkers and Heinkel bombers and Heinkel fighters, did not cease unloading on the town bombs weighing from 1,000lb. downwards and, it is calculated, more than 3,000 two-pounder aluminium incendiary projectiles. The fighters, meanwhile, plunged low from above the centre of the town to machine-gun those of the civilian population who had taken refuge in the fields.

The whole of Guernica was soon in flames except the historic Casa de Jontas with its rich archives of the Basque race, where the ancient Basque Parliament used to sit. The famous oak of Guernica, the dried old stump of 600 years and the young new shoots of this century, was also untouched. Here the kings of Spain used to take the oath to respect the democratic rights (fueros) of Vizcaya and in return received a promise of allegiance as suzerains with the democratic title of Señor, not Rey Vizcaya. The noble parish, church of Santa Maria was also undamaged except for the beautiful chapter house,

which was struck by an incendiary bomb.

At 2 am today when I visited the town the whole of it was a horrible sight, flaming from end to end. The reflection of the flames could be seen in the clouds of smoke above the mountains from 10 miles away. Throughout the night houses were falling until the streets became long heaps of red impenetrable debris.

Many of the civilian survivors took the long trek from Guernica to Bilbao in antique solid-wheeled Basque farmcarts drawn by oxen. Carts piled high with such household possessions as could be saved from the conflagration clogged the roads all night. Other survivors were evacuated in Government lorries, but many were forced to remain round the burning town lying on mattresses or looking for lost relatives and children, while units of the fire brigades and the Basque motorized police under the personal direction of the Minister of the Interior, Señor Monzon, and his wife continued rescue work till dawn.

#### CHURCH BELL ALARM

In the form of its execution and the scale of the destruction it wrought, no less than in the selection of its objective, the raid on Guernica is unparalleled in military history. Guernica was not a military objective. A factory producing war material lay outside the town and was untouched. So were two barracks some distance from the town. The town lay far behind the lines. The object of the bombardment was seemingly the demoralization of the civil population and the destruction of the cradle of the Basque race. Every fact bears out this appreciation, beginning with the day when the deed was done.

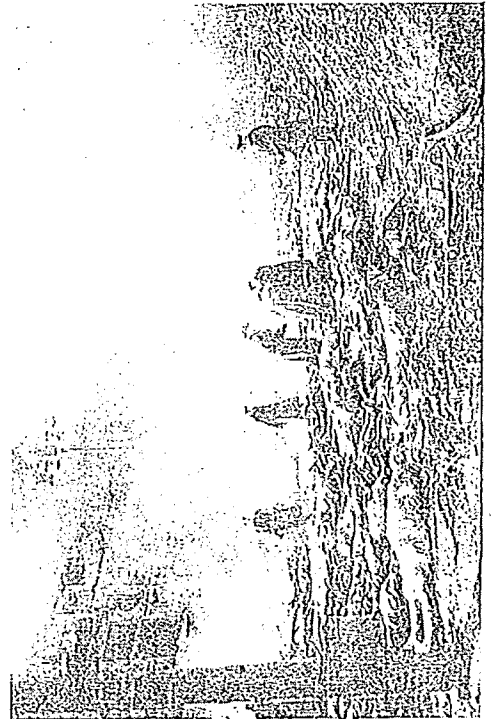
Monday was the customary market day in Guernica for the country round. At 4.30 pm, when the market was full and peasants were still coming in, the church bell rang the alarm for approaching aeroplanes, and the population sought refuge in cellars and in the dugouts prepared following the bombing of the civilian population of Durango on March 31, which opened General Mola's offensive in the







Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*. 1937. Oil on canvas. Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. Picasso intended to show the "human horror" of the attack.



Images from the bombing of Guernica, an ancient Basque city in northern Spain.  
April 26, 1937

