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 **Genealogies for a New State: Painting and Propaganda in  
Franco's Spain, 1936-1940**

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Genealogies for a New State:

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In this article I will introduce the primary types of images used by propagandists working during the Civil War and the immediate post-war period in their attempts to legitimize General Francisco Franco's claims to leadership of the July 1936 military uprising against the Spanish Republic and the resultant dictatorial regime (1939-1975).<sup>1</sup> Artists, arts administrators and propagandists drew from a range of national myths, historic events, religious iconography and art history while learning lessons from Spain's brief experience of modern electoral propaganda during the Second Republic of 1931 to 1936, and from the mass propaganda of its allies: Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany. Threatened by the chaotic war-time situation and by the conflicting aims of the factions that supported the military uprising, Franco appropriated elements from the visual traditions of each of the groups that supported the uprising—the Military, monarchists, Carlists, conservative Catholics and Falange party members—using them to foster historical parallels between past and present that were favorable to his claims to power.

Art historians writing after Franco's death in 1975 have dismissed as derivative and formally mediocre the majority of the images (posters, photographs and paintings) of the dictator produced during his long regime. However, if we take into account the **[End Page 67]** larger system to which they belonged—a larger and self-reinforcing system of reiterated slogans and symbols, circulating in a variety of contexts aimed at diverse audiences: newspapers, magazines, radio, newsreels, novels, history books, school curricula, architectural monuments, religious rituals, advertising, among others—it becomes clear that these images should be studied carefully in order to understand the messages they were intended to convey. In the case of the posters, as we will see, these formed a crucial part of the creation of a climate of fear both in areas held by the rebel forces, and even more so in newly-occupied areas. It should not be forgotten that the threats against those who opposed Franco that were implicit in the posters' slogans and images were carried out during the war and until Franco's death.<sup>2</sup>

Franco was not the leader of the July 18, 1936 military uprising against the Republican government and was not asked to join the *Junta de Defensa Nacional*, led by General Miguel Cabanellas, until August of 1936. In the first months of the war, the military commanders in the so-called "Nationalist" zone, and the various militias formed by political groups that existed before the war, had their own propaganda organizations. As commander of the war's southern forces, Franco's earliest director of propaganda was his colleague and founder of the Spanish Foreign Legion, José Millán Astray (Preston, *Franco* 170). On August 15, Franco upstaged the other members of the Junta when he made the red and yellow monarchical flag the official emblem of all rebel-held areas (Preston, *Franco* 167). In 1931, following the departure of King Alfonso XIII and declaration of a Republic, a new flag consisting of red, yellow and purple stripes was adopted. Franco's return to the traditional flag was the first indication of his strategy to appropriate symbols of royal power and authority to create an image of cohesion and promote his self-appointed role as savior of Spain from the Popular Front Republican government and its allies. In adopting this flag, he appeased many supporters of the military rising, whose ultimate aim was the restoration of the monarchy.

Photographs were the quickest and most economical means to disseminate images of Franco widely in formats such as postcards and posters. As he faced a constant struggle to maintain control over the competing factions that supported the uprising, a unified propaganda line that appropriated elements from the political and religious programs of the population began to be devised. Franco's propaganda staff faced the challenging task of fashioning for him the image of an imposing...

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