

The Life and Times of Sacco and Vanzetti

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Summary of Collection

This collection contains material related to the Sacco-Vanzetti case. There are primary accounts by people directly involved, letters to and from Sacco and Vanzetti, secondary historical retellings, fictional pieces inspired by the case, and works that provide cultural, historical, and political context for the events surrounding Sacco and Vanzetti's seven year imprisonment and execution.

The Life and Times of Sacco and Vanzetti

My first encounter with Sacco and Vanzetti was in my eleventh grade American History class. A picture of the two men was in the top left-hand corner of my textbook with a tiny blurb about how they had been executed in Massachusetts in 1927 for a crime that they may not have committed. I was curious enough to ask my teacher about it, but he told me not to worry about it. Because of his insistence that they were not important, the names Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti stayed with me.

A few years later, I took a course on working with modern literary manuscripts at the Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington. We had the library's entire collection of over seven million manuscripts to choose from when picking our semester project, so I was naturally having a difficult time choosing a manuscript collection to focus on. As I sifted through the finding aids, I saw Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti again. As I started reading through the original letters the library had, I quickly became entrenched in their story. Their pen-marks on the page, the quirky misspellings, and the emotion with which they both wrote quickly made Sacco and Vanzetti even more human than that first image I had first seen years before. I went home that day and bought the Penguin edition of the letters, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, edited by Marion Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson. It wasn't long after I read their edition that I discovered a large discrepancy between the original holographs and that publication. I needed to know what happened.

I started browsing bookstores and the internet for good explanations of the case. When a book about Sacco and Vanzetti was affordable, I bought it. From Bruce Watson's *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind*, I learned that two men were murdered outside of the Slater and Morrill Shoe Company in 1920, and that Sacco and Vanzetti had been convicted of the crime and that there were shady circumstances surrounding their arrest and conviction. I learned about Celestino Medeiros and how the courts ignored his confession to

the crimes for which Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. I discovered the aftermath of the case, when thousands of people marched in the streets in one of the largest funeral processions in Boston's history.

I quickly became obsessed with the story of Sacco and Vanzetti. My work with their letters turned into an honors thesis in which I compared the Jackson and Frankfurter edition to the original manuscripts. In order to make a good comparison, I needed to know even more about Sacco and Vanzetti, so I continued to find and read any books about them that I could. My thesis advisor gave me Paul Avrich's book, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*, from which I discovered how politically motivated their executions had been. Before reading that book, I had not realized that the jury was influenced by their anarchist views just as much as their Italian identities. This sparked my interest in their particular brand of anarchism. I purchased *Property is Theft!*, an anthology of J.P. Proudhon's writings on anarchism and *Faccia a faccia col nemico* [trans. Face to Face with the Enemy] because both were especially influential on Vanzetti's politics. I also started to become more interested in the social and political climate of time period, so I got a copy of Bill Bryson's *One Summer: America, 1927* which describes what happened during the summer that Sacco and Vanzetti were executed.

Since I began my research on Sacco and Vanzetti, I have gathered various materials along the way. Every time I walk into a used bookstore and see a book on Sacco and Vanzetti that I don't already have, I purchase it. I found my copy of Robert H. Montgomery's *Sacco-Vanzetti: The Murder and the Myth* at Brattle Book Shop, just a few steps from where thousands of people gathered in the streets to protest the men's imprisonment. Some items have been given to me by friends who know how much I like to read about the case, and others I spent a long time tracking down, as in the case of *Facing the Chair* by John Dos Passos. As my collection continues to grow, I hope to expand it to include more works about Sacco and Vanzetti,

especially those in other languages. There are many books published in Russian about the case, as well as a number of French and German accounts. I also hope to include more of the many creative works based on the case to join the few I do have, like Mark Binelli's postmodern novel *Sacco and Vanzetti Must Die!* and Howard Fast's dramatization of the Sacco and Vanzetti case.

Bibliography

Works by Sacco and Vanzetti

Sacco, Nicola and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*. Ed. Marion Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson. 1928. New York: Penguin, 2007.

This is the Penguin edition of Gardner Jackson and Marion Frankfurter's edition of *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, with an introduction by Richard Polenber. The letters in this edition were selected by Jackson and Frankfurter to portray the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti. The edition only contains the correspondence written by either Sacco or Vanzetti and does not include any return correspondence, and the dates of the letters included range from 1920-1927.

—. *Altri dovrebbero aver paura: lettere e testimonianze inedite*. Ed. Andrea Comincini. Rome: Nova Delphi, 2012. Print.

This book was difficult to get my hands on. My thesis advisor was kind enough to ask his friend in Italy go into a tiny anarchist bookstore to purchase this book for me. It is an Italian translation of some of the Sacco and Vanzetti letters that are in the Hapgood mss. at the Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington. The translation is mostly accurate, although the translator had marked illegible some things that I was able to read. There is also an extensive introduction to American political life and many images of letters and other documents related to the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

Vanzetti, Bartolomeo. *Non piangete la mia morte: lettere ai familiari*. 1962. Ed. Cesare Pillon and Vicenzina Vanzetti. Lexington: Createspace, 2012. Print.

This is a copy of Vanzetti's Italian letters to his family in Italy. Most letters are addressed to his sister and father, and he discusses a variety of topics, from his struggle to find

meaningful work to his feeling about the justice system in Massachusetts and his life in prison.

—. *Vanzetti: Cartas desde la Prisión*. Trans. Oscar Muslera. Barcelona:

Gedisa Editorial, 1962. Print.

This book is a Spanish translation of *Non piangete la mia morte: lettere ai familiari*. This edition includes all of the letters in the original Italian and a Spanish translation of Vanzetti's essay "Mia vita proletariana" [trans. My Proletarian Life].

Works about the Sacco-Vanzetti Case

Avrich, Paul. *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. Print.

In this book, Paul Avrich outlines the anarchist context of the Sacco-Vanzetti case and the connections to anarchist groups that the two men had. Avrich provides a lot of context for the time period, and touches on subjects such as the Palmer Raids, the first Red Scare, and Luigi Galleani's impact on Sacco and Vanzetti's politics.

Blumenfeld, Harold. *Sacco and Vanzetti: Murderers or Murdered?* New York: Scholastic Books, 1972. Print.

Dos Passos, John. *Facing the Chair: Story of the Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen*. Boston: Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1927. Print.

This is probably the prize of my collection. It is a pamphlet, published shortly after the men's executions. This pamphlet was difficult for me to track down. I contacted a professor emeritus whose life work was on the writings of John Dos Passos because I

heard he was giving his books away and I thought he might have a copy of this. When I told the woman handling all his books that I was looking for this pamphlet, she told me that they threw away anything that looked like a pamphlet. Discouraged, I looked for it elsewhere without much luck. A few weeks later, she called me and asked if the pamphlet I was looking for was called *Facing the Chair*. I said, “yes!” and she gave it to me. She said it was a miracle it had not been thrown out, and that she was happy someone wanted it. The inside front cover is signed by Antio Felicani, the son of one of the founders of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee.

Felix, David. *Protest: Sacco-Vanzetti and the Intellectuals*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965. Print.

Feuerlicht, Roberta Strauss. *Justice Crucified: The Story of Sacco and Vanzetti*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1977. Print.

Jackson, Brian. *The Black Flag: A Look Back at the Strange Case of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. Print.

Joffe, Edward M. *Sacco and Vanzetti: Guilty as Charged*. Victoria: Trafford, 2007. Print.

In this self-published book, Edward Joffe argues that Sacco and Vanzetti were indeed guilty of the crimes for which they were accused. Drawing almost entirely on the case transcripts alone, Joffe mostly appeals to guilt by association, given Sacco and Vanzetti’s anarchist connections, and cites solely circumstantial evidence. I originally purchased this book because I was curious about the types of arguments Joffe would make to support his position that Sacco and Vanzetti were guilty.

Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan. *The Legacy of Sacco & Vanzetti*. Princeton: Princeton UP,

1976. Print.

Montgomery, Robert H. *Sacco-Vanzetti: The Murder and the Myth*. New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1960. Print.

This book is a rather thorough explanation of the case transcripts, and gives a general overview of the major players in the legal case itself. Montgomery drew almost entirely from the case transcripts themselves. I found this book at Brattle Book Shop in Boston, Massachusetts—a used bookstore that was in business at the time that Sacco and Vanzetti lived in Boston. It is highly possible that some of Vanzetti’s many books had been purchased there. My copy of this book is signed by Robert Montgomery with the date, “July 25, 1960” and it still possesses its original dustjacket.

Porter, Katherine Anne. *The Never-Ending Wrong*. Boston: Atlantic-Little, 1977. Print.

This is Katherine Anne Porter’s firsthand account of her participation in the protests for Sacco-Vanzetti in Massachusetts. She discusses what it was like to be an outside participant in the protests and describes people’s reactions to the executions.

Rappaport, Doreen. *Be the Judge, Be the Jury: The Sacco-Vanzetti Trial*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Print.

Russell, Francis. *Sacco & Vanzetti: The Case Resolved*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. Print.

Sellers, Aldous and Arthur Brown. *Il caso Sacco e Vanzetti con numerose lettere di Nicola Sacco e Bartolomeo Vanzetti*. Rome: Gherardo Casini Editore, 1967. Print.

This book is a retelling of the basic facts of the case taken from the court transcripts. There are also excerpts of some of Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s letters translated into Italian

from their original English. At the end of the book, there is an essay written by Michele Catalano, an Italian lawyer from Milan, which discusses the usefulness of this book for learning about Sacco and Vanzetti and the importance of the case as a whole.

Tejada, Susan. *In Search of Sacco and Vanzetti: Double Lives, Troubled Times, and the Massachusetts Murder Case That Shook the World*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2012. Print.

Topp, Michael. *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005. Print.

Watson, Bruce. *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Print.

Weeks, Robert P. *Commonwealth vs. Sacco and Vanzetti: A Book of Primary Source Materials*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1958. Print.

Young, William and David E. Kaiser. *Postmortem: New Evidence in the Case of Sacco and Vanzetti*. Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1985. Print.

Creative Works Inspired by the Case

Binelli, Mark. *Sacco and Vanzetti Must Die!* Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 2006. Print.

Dos Passos, John. *U.S.A.* 1930. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1960. Print.

John Dos Passos' famous trilogy *U.S.A.* contains episodes inspired by the Sacco and Vanzetti case, especially in the third installment, *The Big Money*. I was given this copy of *U.S.A.* at the same time I was given *Facing the Chair*.

Fast, Howard. *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A New England Legend*. New York: The Blue Heron Press, 1953. Print.

Vitiello, Justin. *Vanzetti's Fish Cart*. New York: Mellen Poetry Press, 1991. Print.

Historical, Cultural and Political Context

Bryson, Bill. *One Summer: America 1927*. New York: Anchor Books, 2014. Print.

Cronaca Sovversiva. *Faccia a faccia col nemico: cronache giudiziarie dell'anarchismo militante, volume 1*. East Boston: Gruppo autonomo, 1914. Print.

Faccia a faccia col nemico: cronache giudiziarie dell'anarchismo militante, volume 1 [trans. Face to Face with the Enemy: Judicial Chronicles of Militant Anarchism, volume 1] is a collection of issues of the *Cronaca Sovversiva*, an Italian anarchist newspaper started by Luigi Galleani—the anarchist with whom Sacco and Vanzetti most closely aligned themselves. Vanzetti often wrote for this newspaper anonymously.

Gage, Beverly. *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

This book gives a historical context for the bombing on Wall Street on September 16, 1920 and discusses the Palmer Raids and the First Red Scare in great detail. Sacco and Vanzetti are mentioned throughout this book because of their personal connections with

some of the people involved in this attack and their associations with militant anarchist Luigi Galleani.

Proudhon, Pierre Joseph. *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*. Ed. Iain McKay. Oakland: AK Press. 2011. Print.

Vanzetti was majorly influenced by Proudhon's anarchism. He even started translating Proudhon's essay "La guerre et la paix" [trans. "War and Peace"] from French into English. This anthology does not contain Proudhon's "La guerre et la pax," which has still not been translated into English in its entirety, but it does highlight most of Proudhon's major works and ideas, which we can see presented throughout Vanzetti's letters. I bought the hoping that it would have "La guerre et la paix" in it, but it proved useful anyway.

Puleo, Steve. *The Boston Italians: A Story of Pride, Perseverance, and Paesani, from the Years of the Great Immigration to the Present Day*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2008. Print.

This book gives a history of Italian immigration to Boston and explains the cultural issues and blatant discrimination that Italian immigrants in Boston faced upon arrival. Sacco and Vanzetti are briefly mentioned in the chapter titled, "War, Anarchists, Assimilation."