

administrative response to similar documented reports. Paul was 53 years old at the time the film was made in 2006. He narrates the film with frequent close-up reflections by extended family members, along with clips from home movies and photos taken while the children were growing up. The parents of the abused man, remarkably, maintain their devotion to religion, although not without stirrings of anger and deep resentment against Church officials.

The film details Church mismanagement of clergy accused of sexual abuse, punctuating a series of devastating accusations with sometimes visceral visual effects that suggest the intense disillusionment that motivated the film's making. It speaks more to hypocrisy and insensitivity to the victims rather than to the question of clerical celibacy or to Church teachings on sexuality in general. The lure that Birmingham seemed to use was counseling boys who confessed to self-abuse. While teaching rigid sexual standards, accused priests preyed on teenagers made vulnerable by their pious upbringing. Near the end of the film we hear the soulful lament of the alienated brother: "I want the magic to be real. I want to believe the impossible but the Church is all too human."

Hand of God ends with the Vatican's announcement of Cardinal Ratzinger's election as Pope Benedict XVI. The closed clerical culture of the Church that operates in secret underlies the pain and resentment in this family and community.

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Sacco and Vanzetti.

By Peter Miller.

Willow Pond Films, 2007.

80 minutes. DVD format, color.

On April 15, 1920, a robbery occurred at a shoe factory in South Braintree, Massachusetts, during which a paymaster and his guard were shot to death and nearly \$16,000 of the company's payroll was stolen. A few weeks later, two Italian immigrant anarchists, Nicola Sacco, a shoemaker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fishmonger, were arrested as suspects in the crime. The following year they were tried, found guilty, and, although the evidence against them was contradictory and inconclusive, they were sentenced to death.

Set against the background of the Red Scare, the case rapidly won the attention of radicals, labor organizations, and the Communist Party, becoming a national and international *cause célèbre*. As motion after motion for a new hearing were denied, worldwide support reached enormous proportions with millions becoming convinced that the two men were innocent. Rallies and demonstrations were held in all major world cities, dozens of pamphlets were written by famous intellectuals, poets, and artists, and hundreds of petitions were signed to protest the unfairness of the trial. But all attempts to save them were vain: on August 23, 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti were electrocuted.¹

The “passion of Sacco and Vanzetti,” as artist Ben Shahn described their ordeal, has generated extensive scholarly attention and inspired hundreds of artistic and literary works, including poems and songs, plays, paintings, and films. Indeed, the case “that will not die” continues to spur interest and controversy. In the last few years alone three new books have been published: *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders and the Judgment of Mankind* (2007) by Bruce Watson; *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case* (2005) by Michael Topp; and *Representing Sacco and Vanzetti* (2005), an anthology edited by Jerome Delamater and Mary Anne Trasciatti.

Released on the eightieth anniversary of Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s deaths, Peter Miller’s 82-minute film, entitled simply *Sacco and Vanzetti*, is the latest contribution to this rich legacy. From a historical point of view the film does not add anything new to the existing literature: It provides no stunning revelations, interpretations, or original evidence. Yet, as the first full-length documentary of the case, it is a much needed and welcome addition.

A producer of several PBS historical documentaries and a collaborator of Ken Burns, Miller tells the story accurately and engagingly. It is obvious that he has carefully studied the case, using all available primary and secondary sources, including the writings of Sacco and Vanzetti (mostly letters they wrote in prison), which are dramatically interpreted in the film by actors Tony Shalhoub and John Turturro.² Rather than using a single narrative voice, which he found too authoritarian for a movie about anarchists, Miller lets historians who have studied the case (Nunzio Pernicone, Mary Anne Trasciatti, Michael Topp, David Kaiser) and people with personal connections to Sacco and Vanzetti (such as Joe Galvani, a neighbor of Vanzetti, or Fernanda Sacco, the niece of Nicola Sacco), tell the story. Their commentaries are carefully interwoven with archival footage, photographs, newspapers articles, and clips from the 1971 Italian film, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, by Giuliano Montaldo, who is also frequently interviewed. The film’s outstanding original score, composed by musician John La Barbera and inspired by Italian folk music, along with a few songs about Sacco and Vanzetti written by Woody Guthrie and performed in the film by his son Arlo, help provide the perfect sound track to the story.

The film can be divided into three parts—the first part provides biographical information about Sacco and Vanzetti, their Italian backgrounds, their experience in America, and their political beliefs; the second part reconstructs the crime and the circumstances of Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s arrest; while the third part focuses on the vicissitudes of the trial and the eventual execution.

As the film makes clear, although Sacco and Vanzetti have been inextricably linked by their arrest and execution, they had very different lives. Vanzetti came from a small town near the northern city of Turin; Sacco came instead from the southern region of Puglia. Vanzetti had a difficult childhood, constantly struggling against poverty while Sacco had a relatively comfortable life. Unknown to each other, both left Italy in 1908 in search of better opportunities, although the film suggests that Vanzetti’s choice to migrate was also strongly motivated by his mother’s death from cancer.

Sacco traveled with his brother Sabino and settled in Milford, Massachusetts, where a family friend helped them get jobs and accommodations. He eventually became a skilled shoemaker, married, and lived comfortably, earning much more than the average worker’s wage. To a large extent, his was a “successful” immigrant story.

Vanzetti, by contrast, had a terrible experience in the New World. Alone and with no relatives or friends to welcome him, he first lived in New York City where he worked as a dishwasher under grim conditions. He eventually quit and began moving from town to town, performing a variety of unskilled jobs and often sleeping outdoors. He finally settled to Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1913, where he rented a room in the house of Vincenzo Brini, a fellow anarchist, and began working as a fish peddler – the job he had at the time of his arrest.

What Sacco and Vanzetti shared was a deep faith in the anarchist “Ideal” and an exceptional empathy for the poor and the oppressed. Both are described in the film as decent human beings, gentle, honest, and peaceable by nature – a characterization that is strongly supported by the moving letters quoted in the film. While emphasizing Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s profound humanism and idealism, Peter Miller, however, is careful to not overromanticize them or cast them as random innocent victims. The film clearly shows that they were also militant revolutionaries, followers of the ultra-anarchist Luigi Galleani who openly advocated insurrectionary violence and armed retaliation against the capitalist system. In all likelihood it was the Galleanisti, as the followers of Galleani were known, who were responsible for the rush of bombings against authority figures that took place in 1919 in response to the infamous Palmer raids. As Nunzio Pernicone suggests, Sacco and Vanzetti were not at the core of the movement, but they certainly knew what was going on.

From Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s backgrounds, the film moves to the South Braintree crime and the controversial arrest and trial that followed. Echoing the beliefs of most historians who have studied the case, Miller suggests that Sacco and Vanzetti not only failed to receive a fair trial but were also innocent. Michael Topp, for example, recounts that the prosecution knew that Vanzetti’s gun did not match the weapon that was used during the robbery and deliberately lied to the court. In the case of Sacco, new ballistic evidence suggests that one of the six bullets that struck the two men did come from his gun (the other five came from a gun that was never recovered). But as David Kaiser notes, the question is whether the prosecution used genuine evidence. If they had lied about Vanzetti, chances are they also may have altered evidence to convict Sacco.

In addition to detailing the unfairness of the trial, the film powerfully exposes the enormous prejudices and hostility that existed in the early twentieth century toward immigrants and dissenters. Nowhere is this more evident than in the behavior of Webster Thayer, the judge presiding the case. He had, in the words of Pernicone, “a pathological hatred for radicals.” Making no secret of his contempt for Sacco and Vanzetti, during a football game he was reported to have said to a friend: “Did you see what I did to those anarchist bastards the other day? That should hold them for a while.” In fact, in a single day, Thayer had denied all motions for appeal that had been filed on Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s behalf, including a confession by Celestino Madeiros, a member of a notorious gang of criminals, who said he was the real culprit of the South Braintree crime.

The trial, in short, was a “travesty of justice.” Although Sacco and Vanzetti had both good alibis and numerous witnesses to testify on their behalf, they were considered unreliable by the jury because they were Italians. “How can you believe an Italian testifying on behalf of another Italian?” says historian Howard Zinn. “You could only believe an Anglo-Saxon testifying about an Italian, especially if you are talking to an all

Anglo-Saxon jury and judge." Sacco and Vanzetti were foreigners, atheists, and anarchists. As Mary Anne Trasciatti aptly notes, they "stood as much chance to get a fair trial as a black accused of rape in the South."

Although the film spends considerable time in detailing the trial and its significance regarding civil liberties and the rights of immigrants, what really shines through is the extraordinary humanity and dignity of Sacco and Vanzetti. As Miller himself points out in an interview (on one of the special features on the DVD), this is not just a film about injustice but about two interesting and complicated men of deep poetic sensibility and true courage. *Sacco and Vanzetti* is able to capture the spirit that animated the early twentieth-century struggle for the creation of a truly democratic and egalitarian society. Both inspirational and educational, it should be a required viewing in high schools and colleges to promote a better understanding of American history and correct many of the omissions and distortions about radicals that persist in many history textbooks.

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Notes

1. See, for example, John Dos Passos, *Facing the Chair: Story of the Americanization of Two Foreign born Workmen* (Boston: Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1927); Robert Montgomery, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Murder and the Myth* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1960); David Felix, *Protest: Sacco-Vanzetti and the Intellectuals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965); Herbert B. Ehrmann, *The Case That Will Not Die: Commonwealth vs. Sacco and Vanzetti* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969); Roberta Strauss Feurlicht, *Justice Crucified: The Story of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977); Francis Russel, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Case Resolved* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
2. See Marion Denman Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson, eds., *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* (1928; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

Merica.

By Federico Ferrone, Michele Manzolini, and Francesco Ragazzi.

Mithril Production, 2007.

65 minutes. DVD format, color.

In scholarly and artistic works, the connection between the experience of emigration from Italy and that of immigration to Italy often functions as merely a marginal device, that is, as an introductory or a conclusive reference. This is not the case for the documentary *Merica*, a well-crafted comparative work that brings history into the present and vice versa in dynamic ways by considering the implications of people's