

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.

—MARCELLA BENCIVENNI

Hostos Community College of The City University of New York

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

movement for the meaning of national identity, cultural formation, and civic participation in and outside of Italy. At its core, the documentary deconstructs the myth of the American Dream by definition, a dream of social improvement that is obviously applicable beyond the United States. This deconstruction is captured in the incisive initial segment. Through the use of colorful cardboard-like figurines, quite reminiscent of Emanuele Luzzati's animated cartoons, the multimedia artist Giuseppe Ragazzini briefly depicts the assembly-line mechanism that transformed emigrants into mere goods for the labor market. It also shows how these emigrants were in part "lost" at sea during the journey, whereas others reached America and were swallowed up by a universally symbolic Statue of Liberty. The resulting canvas is a stratified image explicitly recapitulating the routes and destinies of many millions of Italians scattered throughout the world, while implicitly pointing to the perilous condition of current immigrants trying to reach the so-called First World.

The emigration-immigration link is explored more directly in the rest of the documentary. The effectiveness of this comparative frame lies in its focus on the Italian law that allows descendents of emigrated Italians to become Italian citizens. While this law applies to descendants worldwide, the directors have selected Brazil in order to delve into the effects of the law. This proves to be a thoughtful choice since it offers them the possibility of looking at the double contemporary flows from a Third World country as they reconstruct stories of emigration from Italy to Brazil, a country with 25 million Italian descendants, according to the directors. The consequent structure of the documentary interlaces three registers of voices: the biographical tales of Italo-Brazilians reminiscing on their ancestors' experiences as immigrants in South America; the firsthand immigration experiences of Italian descendants who have recently moved from Brazil to Italy thanks to the above-mentioned law; and the stories of Brazilians who have emigrated to Italy, even though they had no obvious cultural tie to this country. The directors smoothly compose this mosaic of voices through a skillful montage technique resorting to parallel and alternating interviews in Italy and Brazil, aimed at emphasizing the similarities shared by migrating people across space and time.

Interestingly, the directors chose the Veneto region as the specific destination of this contemporary migrant trajectory. Simultaneously representing the major departure point for Italian emigrants between 1870 and 1915 and the richest area in Italy today, this region encapsulates the contradictions of modernity in Italy and points to the dangers of amnesia and distortion about the country's history of emigration. Through a migratory aesthetics that lets the narrative travel back and forth across the Atlantic, traces of Italian culture are mapped in the region of Espírito Santo in Brazil, an area with a high density of Italian descendants, the same way new spaces for social gatherings are identified in the Veneto region, especially in Verona and Treviso: churches for spiritual and social meetings; fairs for entertainment and political organization; and bars and shops for the consumption of goods, music, games, and the like from the place of origin. Nostalgia, cultural preservation, pride, and/or the political fight for dignity and recognition are common to all these immigrant spaces on both sides of the ocean.

As the diachronic and synchronic levels intersect to sketch a sense of the collective migration history, individual voices emerge forcefully and verbalize different migratory projects. The principal narrative thread is that of the Fantin De Oliveiras family: The Italian-Brazilian grandmother presents the return of Italian descendants

back to Italy as a Biblical prophecy. She seems certain that her grandson Tiago, an ex-night guard, now has a better life in Italy, similar to his brother Felipe, who from Brazil dreams of a free, democratic Italy, a pined-for destination for his adventure as “*un Italiano dentro*” (“one who feels Italian on the inside”). Yet, from the Veneto, Tiago voices a deep disillusionment vis-à-vis a country that fundamentally sees all those who do not speak the language and come from a non-First World country, no matter what documents they hold, as undesirable strangers. The difficulties encountered today are mirrored in the original stories of the emigrants from the Veneto who moved to Brazil, in the hope of breaking away from a country plagued by poverty, violence, and lack of prospects.

Without resorting to oversimplifications, *Merica* traces the functioning (or malfunctioning) of migration laws and plans in the past as well as in the present. On the one hand, it questions the erroneous representation of past emigrations as the result of smooth intercontinental passages opening new opportunities, and eventually success through integration, thanks to the migrants’ hard work and the social services granted by foreign countries (jobs, housing, etc.). As some of the people interviewed in Brazil point out, in the event that they were able to survive a terrible forty-day-long journey that often turned the Atlantic into an unexpected cemetery, Italian immigrants were isolated in special structures to make sure they were not harboring dangerous illnesses. If they were given land it was to function as needed labor force substituting for the slaves after the 1888 abolition: In any case, they worked under extreme conditions, without being given housing. Moreover, during World War II they were forbidden from speaking Italian for political reasons. On the other hand, the documentary also reframes the perception of the Italian citizenship law as a golden door to Italy and the First World. *Merica* clearly highlights how this law grants administrative rights (the vote) but does not address the inevitable distances that cultural differences create within a society like the Italian one, which is generally quite impermeable to accepting “foreigners.” Even though the directors do not mention the role played by the “return programs” in the Veneto, offering economic privileges such as job contracts, travel funds, and housing incentives to the descendants, the words of the then mayor of Treviso, Giancarlo Gentilini, indirectly point to a double standard. In a farcical, yet sadly real, invective-filled interview against the “barbarians invading Italy,” Gentilini defends Italian descendants as desirable immigrants for the “high-civilization”-based values they share with Italians, according to his social cleansing program. In reality, the Veneto appears as a region with a tangible presence of nondescendant immigrants (including undocumented ones) in all social and economic sectors. Increasingly unable to address in constructive ways this changing reality, the local institutions and public opinion tend instead to favor exclusionary politics. (Surprisingly enough, though, *Merica* was largely funded by the Veneto Region.)

As a result, *Merica* ultimately shows the constructed nature of citizenship, while denouncing the particularly convoluted artificiality of the Italian law, which promotes citizenship as natural, when in fact it is strongly controlled by the bureaucratic apparatus (recent requests at the Italian Consulate in Rio de Janeiro have a projected waiting period of fifteen years) and made possible by social and cultural practices. In showing the aberrations of such an approach, especially vis-à-vis the restrictive access to citizenship for nondescendant immigrants and their children residing in Italy, the directors of *Merica*

in the end suggest that all that the law produces is a sense of entitlement and a parallel sense of disillusionment among the descendants. As one of the interviewees brilliantly remarks: “Those descendants who come with the myth of fatherland roots are bound to be disappointed since they take for granted a form of belonging that is not automatic at all.” Individual paths of success are potential engines of change, but in a condition of subalternity they cannot lead to any integration unless they are supported by a collective fight for rights. This involves immigrants (descendants and nondescendants) and Italians alike in what is a crucial social “conflict” toward legalization and full social recognition, as Sergio Zulian from the Migrants Office in Treviso maintains.

Merica is an ideal resource to open a course on immigration in Italy or to conclude one on emigration from Italy, but it can also be used in a class on international migrations in order to consider European colonial legacies as well as citizenship theories and policies. Within a seminar on film, it also represents an interesting example of innovative documentary-making for the nonsynchronous use of the sound (including radio program excerpts); a large palette of language mixtures and dialect inflections; and the painting-like quality of the shots of industrial, rural, and urban landscapes dialoging with the collage of interviews. Finally, the documentary – with its ability to speak to different generations from personal and institutional perspectives, productively bringing together the individual and the citizen – would certainly be appropriate for a film series, especially one geared toward both academic and nonacademic audiences.

– TERESA FIORE

Montclair State University

Ricordati di noi!

By Paul Tana.

École des Médias at the Université du Québec à Montréal, 2007.

26 minutes. DVD format, color.

This short documentary is in many ways a film about film. More specifically, *Ricordati di noi!* is about *Teledomenica*, an Italian-language television program broadcast for thirty years in Montreal beginning in 1964. It is the story of how a recent chance encounter between the director of the documentary and the host of the show led to the salvaging of over one hundred reels of film that had been lying forgotten in the basement of a television studio. The documentary shows spools of film being cleaned, cataloged, synchronized, and stored in the vaults of the Cinémathèque Québécoise, a film archive founded in 1963 and supported by the Québec provincial government. Two weeks after the move, we are told through a voice-over narration, a flood badly damaged the film’s original repository. Fate, it seems, wanted *Teledomenica* preserved for posterity.

After World War II, Canada received as many immigrants from Italy as did the United States. But, unlike the United States, this wave completely overwhelmed the over-100,000 Italians listed in the 1941 census. By 1971, Italians numbered 730,000 and