

SACCO AND VANZETTI  
AND  
THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

By

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Presented at the Graduate Club  
in New Haven, Connecticut  
on February 19, 1999

# Haven Evening Register.

WITH SUNDAY MORNING EDITION

NEW HAVEN, CONN., TUESDAY, AUGUST 23, 1927

24 PAGES. PRICE TWO

**WEATHER**  
TONIGHT: SHOWERS.  
TOMORROW: CLEAR-COOL.  
TIDES  
HIGH, 8:45 A. M.; 9:45 P. M.  
LOW, 2:45 A. M.; 3:45 P. M.  
Standard Time.

## MAN KIN OF MED PAIR

B. Jackson At-  
se Sacco and  
Vanzetti  
Long Vigil

one night of untol-  
ering as they learned  
men with whom they  
and hoped for seven  
put to death. Mrs.  
Miss Luigia Vanzetti  
by a New Haven phy-  
th B. Jackson, of the  
Pediatrics, New Ha-  
according to Associated  
this morning. Yes-  
he wife and sister of  
is were taken to the  
Beacon Hill apartment  
to the death cells in  
noon. It was Dr. Jack-  
son, who awaited them  
through crowds of  
a place where they  
died in their grief.  
moment, about 11:30  
ning, when a telephone  
word of the execution  
was, dispatches state  
attention was necessary  
women. The apart-  
d by Miss Wedgwood,  
child hygiene division  
Health Department. It  
Dr. Jackson spent the  
most of the night with

lial part of Beacon Hill  
sist for hours, when  
she echoed up and down  
elling that a telephone  
ing of the electrocution  
solved by the waiting  
a friend arrived with an  
the scenes in the death  
nd the agonized cries  
d. The remainder of the  
a vigil for Dr. Jackson  
rs who were attempting  
sufferings of Mrs. Sacco  
asetti, for loud weeping  
be heard for blocks  
rillions of the night at  
servants.  
that Dr. Jackson had  
tally connected with the  
situation in Boston  
week-end came as a sur-  
relatives, friends and ac-  
ra, who stated that she  
a Boston a week ago for  
her brother, but had had

# UNITED STATES IS CALLED AS RIOTS RAGE ABROAD OVER SACCO EXECUTION

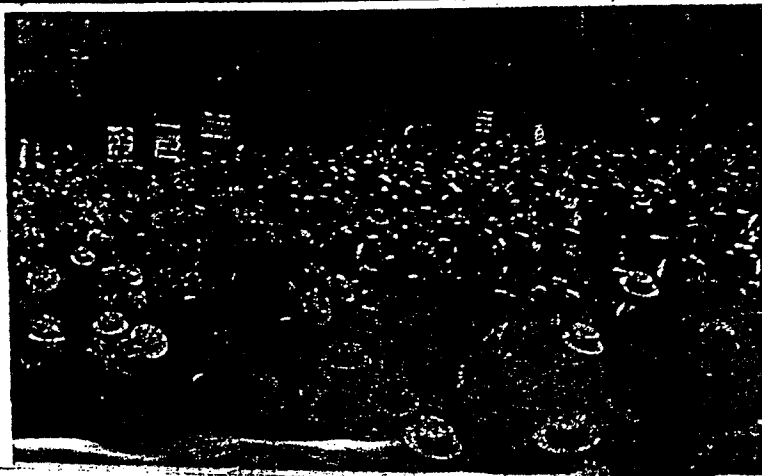
## BAD DISORDERS REPORTED IN FOREIGN CITIES

Demonstrators Storm Public  
Buildings In Geneva.  
South American Sym-  
pathizers Parade

New York, Aug. 23 (AP)  
—Demonstrations in behalf  
of Sacco and Vanzetti were  
staged before and after their  
execution in various Euro-  
pean and South American  
cities.

At one place—Geneva—  
they took a serious turn. The  
manifestants after marching  
on the United States consulate

## Sympathizers In Huge Mass Meeting



## AMERICA DEATH VERY QUIET

Throng of 12,000  
York Held  
Check  
Police

New York, Aug. 23 (AP)  
—Announcement  
cation of Sacco  
was received  
crowds that gath-  
lic squares and  
paper bulletin bo-  
cities after a dis-  
ing police vigil-  
eral uneasiness.  
At midnight in New  
York, where police  
persons had gathered  
ing "Sacco and



NICOLA SACCO

BARTOLOMEO VANZETTI

## All Arguments Counsel Denies Petition of Bay Supreme

Boston, Aug. 15  
full bench of the  
Supreme Court to  
relief to Nicola Sacco  
Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who  
from execution for mu-  
pires at midnight on Aug.  
In a decision signed by  
justices who heard the  
ments, the court overruled  
ceptions of their counsel  
refusal of Judge Thayer in  
Superior Court to grant  
of sentence, a stay of  
execution and a new trial,  
the refusal of Justice Brandeis  
of the Supreme Court to  
a writ of error. The court  
denied a petition for a writ  
error addressed to the  
bench.

This appears to exhaust all  
ability of action by defense  
sel in the Massachusetts  
They had announced previous  
the event of an adverse Court  
decision.

POWER LAUNCH  
INTO

**SACCO AND VANZETTI  
AND THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA**

By Neil Thomas Proto

**INTRODUCTION**

**The Nation and the World.** On the last day of the lives of Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, America's most noted poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, published "Justice Denied in Massachusetts". Its theme was the blight which had fallen upon life; the earth was now sour. "Evil," she wrote, "does overwhelm the larkspur and the corn. We have seen them go under."

The poet's words rippled throughout the world, in cities in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa, as thousands lined streets and filled meeting halls, with eyes teared and souls torn by anger, and waited for the fateful moment of the execution. Men and women of literature, science and philosophy, George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, John Dos Passos, Bertram Russell, Upton Sinclair, Madam Curie, Albert Einstein and Alfred Dreyfus pleaded publicly for America not to do this; not to execute these two men for being Italian, for being immigrants, for holding strong views about justice and human decency.

There is, in the writing and recorded words of these men and women, a powerful story of inspiration and commitment to principle that emanated from the brief lives and exemplary character of these two Italians. They all echoed, in their own way, the saddened words and lost hope of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Much of what they said and wrote was in English; understood and read widely.

**Italians and Italian Americans.** In May 1927, less than three months before the execution, the Order Sons of Italy in America petitioned Massachusetts' Governor Alvin Fuller to pardon both men. The Petition was written by Michael Angelo Musmanno, a 29 year old lawyer from Pittsburgh who volunteered his time on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. The Petition read this way:

Today I bring the earnest entreaty of the Sons of Italy of  
America . . .

. . . Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti are not members of this organization. The Sons of Italy does not undertake to interest itself in every Italian or Italian descendant caught in the toils of the law; on the contrary, it frowns upon those Italians who by legal conviction are presumably guilty, and thus to that extent prove themselves unworthy of their name. But the Sons of Italy have seen fit in this case, in spite of the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti, to step forward and express their doubt, their individual and collective doubt as to the guilt of these two men . . .

Now listen to the apprehension in Musmanno's closing plea to Governor Fuller:

If these two Italians are placed upon the electric chair, a pall of gloom will settle over all Italians in this country. And the millions of law-abiding sons of Italy, from New York to California, now proudly claiming the stars and stripes as their own, will wonder how, under the ample folds of liberty and equality of that beloved flag, the cause of true Americanization has been advanced. They will wonder if, after all, they are now outcasts in a land discovered by their own countryman. I honestly believe this will not come to pass.

It did, of course, come to pass. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in the Charlestown State Prison on August 23, 1927. It was front page news in every daily in America and throughout the world. The New Haven *Register* was no exception. It was front page news in almost every edition of the *Register* that August.

The fullness of the story, including the painful moments of the execution, also had been described in Italian language papers for seven years.

"Justice Denied" and "Justice Crucified" were printed on the black arm bands that many mourners wore during the long funeral procession that began in Boston's North End. Amidst the stunned, saddened crowd of 200,000 people, many Italian-Americans marched with dignity and defiance along side the hearses that carried both men; and the black limousine that contained Rosina Sacco and her two young children; and Luigia Vanzetti, who had come from Italy to plead for her brother's life.

Many Italians, hard working, caring men and women, also had come long distances by car and train to be present at this moment; walking in torrential rains; orderly; mourning. Many, too, were beaten and trampled by mounted police before they reached the cemetery. Even a moment of reflection and solidarity among Italian-Americans, about two of their own, would not be tolerated by government authorities.

Their pain was shared by Italian-Americans throughout the nation, many newly arrived, in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco. Demonstrations of sorrow were held; and, in each case, repressed brutally by the city's police. In Chicago, an 18 year old schoolgirl, Aurora D'Angelo, led a demonstration in support of two men she could hardly know. She was arrested. Once released, she did it again.

**New Haven.** In New Haven, the public buildings were closed. Rallies, demonstrations and even soliciting a petition in protest were prohibited. A few who tried were arrested. Elementary constitutional rights of speech and assembly were repressed.

Police were stationed throughout the city, especially in its large Italian-American neighborhoods, watching, prepared. People gathered quietly on street corners, waiting for word of the execution, Sacco first and then Vanzetti; and then, with children in tow, they returned home, to live, uniquely, with the meaning of these deaths.

My mother, Celeste Marie Storlazzi, arrived in this country in 1916, at six years old. She was 17 when this execution occurred, living with her family on Lombard Street. Her father was 39. He had five children.

My Aunt, Rose Proto Sansone, my father's sister, who still lives on Blatchley Avenue, was 11. Only recently did I learn from her how my grandparents followed the story daily on radio; that music about both men was sung in Italian. But it was not until I asked her about these two men that the passion and almost repressed memory of the events emerged quickly, directly, as if it happened only yesterday. "They were innocent, you know," she said. "It was not right. We could not even talk about it."

Recently, during a Symposium at Yale Law School, Rosa DeLauro described, with great eloquence and poignancy, how her mother had kept a scrapbook of the newspaper articles of Sacco and Vanzetti's trial until her aunt saw her working on it. Out of fear of it being discovered in their home, or that it would be shared innocently with friends, she was told to destroy it.

This is not a story about an historical event, or about only two men. It is a story that still lives; that to me, I can still touch through my mother's life, through my Aunt's, through the lives of my grandparents.

The message they and other Italian immigrants got was plain: conform; stay in your place; accept your impotence. Your culture and values and language are not worthy of America.

Many, who for years had collected dimes and quarters for the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, held tightly -- and now quietly -- to their disappointment in law and in those that administered it; and, for many, in their deep belief in the innocence of both men.

Justice, Italian immigrants learned once again, had little to do with the laws and institutions America professed to believe in.

I come back to Michael Angelo Musmanno's words in 1927 to Governor Fuller in his plea for Sacco and Vanzetti. They held true for a generation and in many ways still do: That a "pall of gloom will settle over all Italians in this country". Italian Americans "will wonder if, after all, they are now outcasts in a land discovered by their own countryman."

What did the Sacco-Vanzetti controversy mean to Italian-Americans in 1927? What does it mean today?

Let me return first to the America Sacco and Vanzetti entered in 1908, Sacco through Boston and Vanzetti through Ellis Island. It was the same America the parents, grandparents and great grandparents of many of this city's families also entered, including my own.

## I.

### THE AMERICA THEY ENTERED

Ethnic diversity was not celebrated in the America Italians entered at the turn of the century. Southern Italians were categorized separately by Immigration authorities. They were treated as racially, not merely ethnically different. They settled all over America, including in the South and West.

The Klu Klux Klan and various nativist organizations teemed with racist, ethnic and anti-Catholic hatred throughout this country. In New England, the Immigration Restriction League, was led by many of its most notable Anglo-Saxon families, including the President of Harvard, A. Lawrence Lowell and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts. It was no less bigoted in its purpose. Government acquiesced in and, at times supported the same purposes. Italian immigrants suffered directly and fatally.

**The Lynchings.** In 1891, in New Orleans, nineteen Italian immigrants living in the hard squalor of the French quarter were rounded up in wholesale arrests. They were charged with killing the city's popular police chief, David Hennessy. The only evidence against them was that Hennessy, in his last moments, was alleged to have said a "dago" did it.

Local political leaders, including the Mayor, called for all 19 to be executed. Demonstrations were held and a committee of 50 leading citizens formed to assure such an outcome. "We must teach these [Italians] a lesson", the Mayor told the City Council, "that they will not forget for all time". Otherwise, he continued, "there must be no place for [them] on the American continent."

Ten of the Italians were tried by a duly constituted jury and, after days of evidence and witnesses, were found not guilty. Threats to their lives were voiced openly and with impunity. The authorities claimed that for their safety they should remain in jail, along with the others still awaiting trial.

That night, March 14, 1891, a vicious mob of respected New Orleans citizens, with no resistance, broke into the jail, cornered, and then killed with wanton cold-bloodedness eleven innocent, unarmed Italians seemingly under the law's protection.

It is the largest lynching in American history; where individuals were summarily executed by a mob for a real or presumed crime. Let me repeat that: the largest lynching in American history. No one was ever convicted for these murders.

At that time, my grandfather, Cristofaro Proto, was 26 years old. He had just arrived in America with his 22 year old wife, Teresa.

The Mayor of New Orleans praised the justice and virtue of the lynching. Editorials in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and other papers supported it. Theodore Roosevelt, later to be President of the United States, called it "a rather good thing." That's what my grandfather and grandmother heard. It also was what their neighbors, the teachers of their children, and the priest at their local church heard: "A rather good thing."

Italians in various cities held large demonstrations in protest. They were ridiculed and repressed violently by police and local vigilante groups. The Italian government protested to no avail.

To Richard Gambino, America's most thoughtful and noted historian on the Italian experience in America, this event reflected a "monstrous tradition in America"; an "injustice which remains hidden," directed against Italians.

It is an essential part of our experience in America. For many, it was our first "welcoming" into this Anglo Saxon culture.

The event in New Orleans was not isolated. In the same year, several Italians were lynched in West Virginia. In March 1894, several hundred Italians were driven out of Altoona, Pennsylvania, by an armed mob. In 1895, six Italian labor organizers were lynched in Colorado; and six more were beaten and hanged in Hahnville, Louisiana.

In 1899, a mob dragged three Italian shopkeepers from a jail in Tallulah, Louisiana, caught two others and lynched all five. Their offense: they had treated African-Americans equally in their stores. Italians were attacked and killed by mobs in 1901 in Mississippi, in 1906 in West Virginia, and in 1910 in Tampa, Florida.

**Industrial Violence.** Italian immigrant men and women composed much of the industrial labor force at the turn of the century. Many led the bitter, vicious battles to improve labor conditions in America. Government supported industry. Virtually all were violent. In Ludlow, Colorado, Italian miners, their families and children were murdered shamelessly. In Lawrence, Massachusetts and in Patterson, New Jersey, Italian women particularly, smart, aware of their skills, insisted on fairness, and found themselves isolated, beaten; some tried for crimes they did not commit.

Because of their numbers, their dependence for a livelihood on hard labor or skilled piece work, Italians paid a heavy, visible cost in their lives. Hundreds were killed from mining explosions in Illinois and West Virginia; in factory fires, like the Triangle Shirtwaist fire in 1911, in New York, and from a corporate and industrial America that sought to exploit brutality the health and talents of these earlier Italian immigrants.

They and their families knew it, absorbed it, lived and died with it.

This is the America Sacco and Vanzetti entered. Let there be no illusions about the harshness and hypocrisy they and others confronted, or its singular meaning to Italian Americans.

**Cultural and Economic Repression.** In the same year that Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested, 1920, vigilante mobs invaded the Italian-American community of West Frankfort, Illinois. They dragged people of all ages from their homes, beating many, burning whole neighborhoods. The attacks were repeated. Italians fought back with anger. Five hundred state troopers took three days to end the fighting. Hundreds of Italians were left homeless.



John Higham, author of Stranger in the Land (1967); the standard work in American nativism, said this:

No pogrom has ever stained American soil, nor did any single anti-Jewish incident in the 1920's match the violence of the anti-Italian riot in southern Illinois.

This country's hostility and attempt at cultural and economic repression toward Italian Americans conveyed only one lesson: Italians had only their families and their values to rely upon. They found nothing in the Anglo-Saxon culture or its values to emulate. It made them more introspective, suspicious of the outside world, including the government and its prejudicial form of justice.

It also gave excuse and license to others, in schools, in church, by the police; to discriminate, to point figures, to ridicule, to deny opportunity.

I can only imagine what my paternal grandfather was thinking. He was 26 in 1891 when the lynchings in New Orleans occurred, and now, he was 55 years old, married, with nine children, including an 8 year old son, Matthew. He was earning five dollars a week at Sargent's for 60 hours of work.

America was now the home of the Proto family. There was no leaving. It was 1920. He had witnessed almost 30 years of vicious, bigoted, direct harm to his beloved culture, in this adopted land; and the emergent stereotyping of what he and other Italians, largely powerless and still speaking their native language, knew was now confronting their children.

Sacco and Vanzetti were about to be arrested.

## II.

### THE TRIAL AND ITALIAN AMERICANS

**Italian Immigrant Participation.** Aldino Felicani, a writer and newspaper editor, and a friend of Vanzetti's, chaired the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. Felicani was Italian. The Defense Committee, composed the day after Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested, was made up, initially, of all Italians from Boston's North End. In order to gain financial support and to publicize the unfairness of the trial, Felicani communicated directly with Italian language dailies throughout the nation and abroad.

Italian political activists, especially Carlo Tresca -- who had led Italian workers in strikes throughout the nation often at his own personal peril -- lent vocal and financial support. In the seven years of the Committee's existence, it raised almost five hundred thousand dollars. A majority of its contributors were Italian immigrants throughout the nation. They volunteered time; they led demonstrations: many sacrificed jobs, reputations and savings.

**The Trial.** For those who followed the trial closely, the anti-Italian prejudice was abundantly clear. Prior to their arrest for robbery and murder in May 1920, neither Sacco nor Vanzetti had ever been arrested or convicted of a crime. No Italian-Americans sat on the jury. Many of the witnesses for Sacco and Vanzetti, including some of those who provided alibi testimony, only spoke Italian. They were ridiculed by the prosecution for not understanding English and their testimony was incorrectly translated.

During the trial, the court appointed translator named his newly born son after the trial judge. The government's prosecutor was the Godfather.

Repeatedly, Italian-American customs were denigrated. In his instructions to the jury, the Judge, Webster Thayer, actually said that just because a witness was Italian didn't mean they were unworthy of belief. The jury would, however, have to evaluate their motives for supporting Sacco and Vanzetti. Put differently, none were capable of merely telling the truth.

Immediately after the trial, the eyewitness testimony against both men was thoroughly discredited. The trial judge -- in denying a motion for a new trial -- said "these verdicts did not rest, in my judgment, upon the testimony of the eyewitnesses."

He, of course, knew the truth. A report by the Pinkerton Detective Agency, shown only to the prosecution and known to the trial Judge, found these same witnesses had described different men immediately after the crime. The report was not made public until just before the execution. It was too late.

In fact, Justice Department officials at the time of the trial believed Sacco and Vanzetti innocent of the South Braintree robbery and murder. Its motive was to have both men deported. To its shame and enduring discredit, the Department remained officially silent. Just prior to the execution, two former agents stepped forward publicly with the truth and were attacked as disloyal Americans.

All of this resonated deeply. Italian-Americans knew it was dangerous to support these two men. The Justice Department and local police had many people under surveillance. Lists were kept. Italian-Americans held steady throughout.

As I identified at the outset, they were not alone in supporting these men. But they were precariously alone with respect to their fate, and that of their children, in America.

**The Values of Both Men.** Sacco and Vanzetti held tightly to their heritage and its values. For seven years, in varying intensity, this controversy raged publicly through America. Rosina Sacco visited her husband daily, often with her children. She reflected poignantly the importance of family during adversity. Italians could only admire and respect it.

Vanzetti mastered the English language; wrote articles, poetry and a novella. He reflected the native intellectual skills many Italians brought to this nation. Both men acted with dignity and principle.

It was, however, on the day both men were sentenced to death that Vanzetti, in the most eloquent of manner, said to a stunned, silent courtroom words that resonated with truth to an entire generation:

[M]y conviction is that I have suffered for things I am guilty of. I have suffered because I was an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian.

Many Italian-Americans believed in Sacco and Vanzetti's innocence and still do. History, serious legal analysis and subsequent events have confirmed it.

In 1977, the secret Grand Jury transcript -- that lead to the indictment of both men -- and the personal notes of the prosecutors, were uncovered in the Harvard University Law Library and examined carefully. When combined with other evidence already known, the greatest suspicions of Sacco and Vanzetti's lawyer during and after the trial were revealed as true. The bullet that allegedly caused the murder was not from Sacco's gun. Like the other physical evidence introduced against the defendants, ballistics evidence also was a fabrication. It only confirmed further, the abuse and bigotry which underlaid the conduct of the prosecution and the judiciary.

In truth, Sacco and Vanzetti should never have been indicted. They should never have been convicted.

A reasonable doubt easily existed about their guilt.

**Further Withdrawal and Silence.** To many, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in August 1927 was a "legal murder." To others, the execution was of two Italian murderers, that only confirmed there was something inherently suspect about the values and conduct of all Italian-Americans.

In a nation where Italians were lynched and their neighborhoods invaded with impunity, and greeted publicly with approval, the stigma and stereotyping by others endured; and for many Italians, the response was further withdrawal and silence.

My grandparents believed in the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti. I wish they were alive today to know they were right. I would tell them how deeply grateful I am for their belief in justice. I wish, too, that I understood fully what we and others gained, and what we lost, as an Italian family in America because of their beliefs.

### III.

#### RETHINKING COLUMBUS DAY

In the quiet elegance of Yale University's President's Room, an American premiere in music occurred, in the evening, Columbus Day, October 12, 1997. Following a Symposium on Sacco and Vanzetti hosted by Law School Dean Anthony Kronman, two Broadway performers sang three songs from a new, still unheard musical drama, "Sacco and Vanzetti, A Dream To Many."

Tears and a pained sense of history, unknown and harsh, touched many. A similar unease pervaded the Symposium, attended widely by Italian Americans in this community. The music's performance and the Symposium, also reflected a subtle argument -- that I hope to make substantially less than subtle -- about the meaning of Columbus Day.

**The Cost of Silence.** Little of what I have talked about today did I learn in New Haven's public schools, or at testimonials, or in church or at the State University I attended in this city. Nor did I learn it through our theatre's or symphony; or around the singular event that was intended to recognize the Italian experience in America, Columbus Day.

The celebration of Christopher Columbus' courage and imagination has a long history in America. The nation's Capital is named in honor of that spirit. To Italians arriving in this Nation in extraordinary numbers at the turn of the century, the contradiction of Columbus' stature and the stunning racial and religious prejudice they confronted was not lost. Many died because of it. Evoking Columbus said little to America about what we experienced and who we are.

In 1977, largely at the urging of Congressman Peter Rodino and others, October 12<sup>th</sup> was embraced by Italian Americans as a formal, nationally recognized commemoration not only of Columbus but the Italian experience in America. We

commemorate Columbus, albeit rarely with the depth and intellectual fullness he and other Italian explorers of that era -- Verazzano, the Cabotos -- properly warrant.

What we have failed sadly to do is to commemorate properly the Italian experience in America. It needs not more celebration but more education; serious, thoughtful education; not more fluffy, feel good public television specials about food and family celebrations; not more parades where the marchers outnumber the spectators; or the selling of tee-shirts and buttons that convey messages that, in the end, convey nothing at all.

I look around this Community and the Greater New Haven region, at the substantial number of Italian Americans. Many are now successful, accomplished, perhaps through a much more difficult path than they realized; one layed painfully and at great cost, in culture and language and intellect, by that first generation.

Yet, to me, they are still uncertain, still uneasy, often not very knowledgeable about their broader cultural history in America and how to talk about it, how and why to explain it to others, to their children, to their neighbors, to those young Italian-Americans who are still striving, still confronting harmful stereotypes, who want and need to know more about this history. There is no excuse for it.

Many of those who have succeeded simply do not know it, or worse, those with the skill to research, write and speak about it -- or to encourage others to research, write and speak about it -- remain largely silent or content to let others define who we were, who we are today and how we got here.

**Education.** This culture will only be preserved if its history in America is told directly, in all its harshness, as well as its love and in the commitment that sustained it. We need to know more; to connect the experience of our families and our neighborhood to the broader Italian experience in America.

We need more directed, private financial support and deliberate, specially organized programs that provide serious, thoughtful education, to ourselves as well as our neighbors. And Italians in this community and region, in business, education, labor and politics, are now in a place to lead that education. It should be done in schools, in societies, by our symphony and in our community theatres.

The possibilities are substantial and worthy.

Here are only some examples, drawn from the approximately 40 year time period I discussed.

- **Readings.** Richard Gambino, easily the most thoughtful, informed historian on the Italian experience in America, has written two books, Vendetta (1977) on the 1891 lynchings in New Orleans and Blood of My Blood, written in 1974, about the dilemma of the Italian Americans. They, and other articles he has written, should be assigned reading and the basis for discussion.

With respect to Sacco and Vanzetti, five works are, to me, the most accurate and informative: (i) Louis Joughin and Edmund Morgan, The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti (1948); (ii) Roberta Feuerlicht, Justice Crucified (1977); Michael Angelo Musmanno, After Twelve Years (1939); (iv) Felix Frankfurter, "The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti", Atlantic Monthly (1927); and (v) David Kaiser, Post Mortem (1985).

- **Vanzetti's Writings.** In his 1928 novel Boston, the Pulitzer Prize author, Upton Sinclair, invoked Bartolomeo Vanzetti's words and writings, in English and Italian, and concluded the following:

History records that those who heard the Gettysburg address of Abraham Lincoln were ill pleased by it. [B]ut the future seldom chooses words which are flowery; [instead] it chooses those which have been wrung from the human heart in moments of great suffering and which convey a gleam of spiritual illumination . . .

Pass on, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, your work is done . . . You have spoken the noblest words heard in America in two generations since Abraham Lincoln died.

For all my education and readings, I had never read the words of an Italian in America compared to the eloquence of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Vanzetti's writings and words should be studied.

- **Women.** Italian women led labor strikes and the demand for better working conditions. They often were the least tolerant of factory abuses, especially at Lawrence and Patterson. They also paid dearly; many died in factory fires well into the 1950's.

The history of these events was written in English, by others. There is a powerful story of commitment that has never been told fully or accurately. Many of these same women also supported and believed in Sacco and Vanzetti. Their lives and commitment to fairness need a fresh look.

- **Michael Angelo Musmanno.** Musmanno gave up a successful law career to sleep on the floor of the Defense Committee's office to defend Sacco and Vanzetti. He wrote articles and books long after in defense of their innocence.

The son of Italian immigrants, his father a coal miner, he became a Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice, a Rear Admiral in World War II, a Trial Judge at Nuremberg, the author of two books which became movies. Musmanno's book Columbus Was First provided a detailed, devastating rebuttal to the so-called "Vinland Map", introduced by Yale in 1965 that claimed to show Lief Ericson had "discovered" America. Musmanno is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. He died on Columbus Day, in 1968.

His career was remarkable and worthy of at least one student's attention, in one classroom, in this city.

- **Plays, Poetry and Movies.** Emerging from the Sacco-Vanzetti controversy were more than 140 poems -- three by Edna St. Vincent Millay --; seven plays, including two by Pulitzer Prize author Maxwell Anderson, a 1971 Italian made movie and a 1960 NBC docu-drama. This region's movies and theaters are venues for these works; so too, are school auditoriums, libraries and classrooms.
- **Music.** Folk music about Sacco and Vanzetti was written, performed and recorded by Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and Joan Baez. At least three folk songs, in Italian, were played during the controversy. The music is available.

In 1960, Marc Blitzstein, under a Ford Foundation grant and in cooperation with the Metropolitan Opera, crafted a libretto and over one hundred sheets of music for an opera on Sacco and Vanzetti. He died in 1964, his work incomplete. It remains untouched in the archives of the Lincoln Center Library; no part of it ever heard.

I mentioned earlier the musical drama, "Sacco and Vanzetti, A Dream Too Many." Wouldn't you sit and listen to its pathos and grandeur if performed at the Schubert, or if its music were played by the New Haven Symphony? Or if, at Yale or Southern Connecticut or Quinnipiac, an aria from the Blitzstein Opera, by Sacco, in prison, about his love for Rosina, was performed for the first time?

- **Paintings, Sculpture.** A collection of graphic portrayals entitled "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti" were painted by Ben Shahn in the early 1930's. One hangs today in New York's Whitney Museum. The Boston Public Library has the largest collection of Sacco-Vanzetti photographs and letters in America, and it has the death masks of both men.

It also has a 1931 plaque of Sacco and Vanzetti sculpted by Gutzon Borglum, who sculpted Mount Rushmore. Three times this plaque was rejected by Governors of Massachusetts or Mayors of Boston until, in August of 1997 -- and I was there to witness it -- Governor Paul Celluci and Mayor Thomas Menino accepted it.

Bring some or all of these works of art to New Haven.

- **Sacco's Letters To His Children.** The letters that Sacco and Vanzetti wrote while in prison have been published. They are in English. Three are especially moving. Vanzetti's letter to Dante Sacco, and Sacco's letters to his two children, Dante and Inez. Also published in Italian are Vanzetti's letters to his family in Italy.

These are stunning; moving to read; a deep reflection of the values we hold dear. Read them. Have them read. Give them life.

- **The Actions of Governor Dukakis.** In 1977, in a special, courageous way, Governor Michael Dukakis issued a Proclamation declaring August 23<sup>rd</sup> Sacco and Vanzetti Memorial Day. Nicola and Rosina's grandson, Spencer, was there to receive it. The history of that effort, especially the roles of Italian Americans in bringing it about, needs to be told. School children should read Dukakis' Proclamation if they are to understand the immigrant experience in America.
- **Oral and Written Histories.** Finally, the Dante Alighieri Society of Massachusetts now commemorates the execution every year with essays, speakers and re-enactments of various parts of the story. They have proposed a codification of all Sacco-Vanzetti documents in the state and city archives, and Harvard University; and the placing on a CD Rom for public school use the basic documents that tell the controversy's story.

As many of you know, Anthony Riccio has published a remarkable book about the Italians in Boston's North End. He captured their native intellect and wisdom through their oral histories, in Italian. He is doing the same in New Haven.

There also are people in this City who were alive in 1927, who have stories to tell. One of the women who was arrested for circulating a petition attended the Yale Symposium. For almost a year, after he left New York on his way to Massachusetts, Vanzetti boarded with a family in Meridan. He read at its public library and attended evening classes in English. He also stopped in Middletown. He may have passed through New Haven.



Yale University also has a story to tell. Its law school faculty supported Sacco and Vanzetti, and a member of its Public Health School, Edith Jackson, cared for Luigia Vanzetti when she came to America.

There is history in this city and region. It is waiting to be uncovered, written and told.

### **CONCLUSION**

The pain and apprehension Italian immigrants, and Italian-Americans endured, and the skill with which they navigated America, now warrants a much deeper knowledge. They held tightly -- and sometimes silently -- to the frightening harshness of their experience. They were intuitively wise in the political and legal ways of America. They understood keenly its hypocrisy.

They endured and prospered without special favor from government. Often they were the object of its hostility. They sustained ridicule and defied the conventional wisdom in order to protect their children's lives, and, in doing so, made this place called America -- named after one of our own countryman, Amerigo Vespucci -- a better place to live.

To me, in many respects, Musmanno's words still resonate; perhaps more subtly but no less poignantly. We are no longer outcasts. But there is a broader, deeper and harsher story that needs to be told, frequently and with directness and passion, to ourselves and to our neighbors. It is a distinctive story of a unique form of struggle and triumph. And we are the ones who need to tell it.

There is no better time than Columbus Day.

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