



Mara Lavitt/Register

The New Haven Free Public Library previewed a series of events commemorating the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and its impact on immigrant communities. Library assistant Nkenge Hook of New Haven looks at displays of pages from the Evening Register and other newspapers.

## Series revisits Sacco, Vanzetti

By Joseph Straw  
Register Staff

**NEW HAVEN** — Before there was Mumia Abu-Jamal, there were Fernando Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

In 1920, the men, both Italian immigrants and communist anarchists, were charged with the robbery and murders of a shoe factory payroll clerk and security guard in South Braintree, Mass. outside Boston.

A year later they were convicted and in 1927 both were put to death in the electric chair. Many have argued that Sacco and Vanzetti were framed for the crimes and mistried, then denied appeal and clemency due to their political beliefs, despite their rights under the U.S. Constitution.

Neil Proto, a city native and Washington, D.C.-based attorney has studied and written about Sacco and Vanzetti for years with the hope of raising awareness about the case.

This year New Haven — on Proto's urging — will commemo-

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rate the 75th anniversary of Sacco and Vanzetti's deaths with a series of events displaying artistic works inspired by their case.

Tuesday at the Free Public Library on Elm Street, Mayor John DeStefano Jr. previewed the series, which will include an English adaptation of Dirk Brosse and Frank Van Laecke's Dutch musical Sacco & Vanzetti, retitled "The American Dream."

The musical, adapted by Proto and New York City writer Tony Giordano, will be performed April 20 at the Shubert Theatre.

Proto called the yearlong series, coordinated by City Hall, "a thoughtful, serious contemplation."

"It's exactly what I'd hoped would happen," Proto said. "That the city would play to its strengths."

Other events include a poetry reading on March 12 at the New Haven Colony Historical Society and an October exhibition at the Yale University Art Gallery featuring the work of Ben Sahn, a Lithuanian immigrant who painted and drew several works based on Sacco and Vanzetti's case.

U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-3, who attended Tuesday's announcement, said the Sacco and Vanzetti case illustrates the affect of xenophobia, which has reared its head again in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Both Proto and DeLauro said the country's Italian-American community shook the memory of the Sacco and Vanzetti case in the years since to try to assimilate into American culture.

Now, DeLauro said, we must confront history's facts.

"We have to remember what our country is trying so hard to forget," DeLauro said.