The Sacco and Vanzetti Trial

Objectives:
- Analyze the treatment of immigrants in America through the lens of the Sacco and Vanzetti case
- Summarize the details of the Sacco and Vanzetti case and evaluate the fairness of their trial
- Explain why certain groups were outspoken critics of the treatment of Sacco and Vanzetti by analyzing primary sources they created.

Background:
- The Red Scare and the treatment of immigrants were topics of great debate during 1920s. The arrest, trial, and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti has become the poster child for the treatment of immigrants and radical groups in the early 1920s.

Introduction:
- You will listen to the song “Two Good Men” by Woody Guthrie, one time without the lyrics and once with the lyrics.
- In groups of 3, answer the following questions.
  1. What is the mood of the song?
  2. What facts does the song reveal about its subjects
  3. Hypothesize who Sacco and Vanzetti were and what happened to them.

Discussion Questions:
- How were Sacco and Vanzetti linked to the fear of Bolshevism and anarchism?
- What role did a fear of foreigners play in the accusations of murder?
- Why did the broadside criticize the verdict and the committee that reviewed the trial?

Task:
- You are to write a 300 word “Letter to the Editor” explaining your feelings on the treatment of immigrants using Sacco and Vanzetti as your main example.
- You can take the position that Sacco and Vanzetti were unjustly put to death because they were immigrants, or they can argue that the pair deserved what they got based on previous radical activity.

Closure:
- Together we will look at the Sacco and Vanzetti Memorial that is located in Boston
- We will discuss the memorial and debate Sacco and Vanzetti should be remembered

“WHAT I WISH MORE THAN ALL IN THIS LAST HOUR OF AGONY IS THAT OUR CASE AND OUR FATE MAY BE UNDERSTOOD IN THEIR REAL BEING AND SERVE AS A TREMENDOUS LESSON TO THE FORCES OF FREEDOM SO THAT OUR SUFFERING AND DEATH WILL NOT HAVE BEEN IN VAIN”

BARTOLOMEO VANZEITI, August 22, 1927 (From the Death House of Massachusetts State Prison)
The Sacco-Vanzetti Case Draws National Attention

A paymaster and a security guard are killed during a mid-afternoon armed robbery of a shoe company in South Braintree, Massachusetts. Out of this rather unremarkable crime grew one of the most famous trials in American history and a landmark case in forensic crime detection.

Both Fred Parmenter and Alessandro Berardelli were shot several times as they attempted to move the payroll boxes of their New England shoe company. The two armed thieves, identified by witnesses as "Italian-looking," fled in a Buick. The car was found abandoned in the woods several days later. Through evidence found in the car, police suspected that a man named Mike Boda was involved. However, Boda was one step ahead of the authorities, and he fled to Italy.

Police did manage to catch Boda's colleagues, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who were each carrying loaded weapons at the time of their arrest. Sacco had a .32 caliber handgun--the same type as was used to kill the security guards--and bullets from the same manufacturer as those recovered from the shooting. Vanzetti was identified as a participant in a previous robbery attempt of a different shoe company.

Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists, believing that social justice would come only through the destruction of governments. In the early 1920s, mainstream America developed a fear of communism and radical politics that resulted in a anti-communist, anti-immigrant hysteria. Sacco and Vanzetti, recognizing the uphill battle ahead, tried to put this fear to their advantage by drumming up support from the left wing with claims that the prosecution was politically motivated. Millions of dollars were raised for their defense by the radical left around the world. The American embassy in Paris was even bombed in response to the Sacco-Vanzetti case; a second bomb intended for the embassy in Lisbon was intercepted.

The well-funded defense put up a good fight, bringing forth nearly 100 witnesses to testify on the defendants' behalf. Ultimately, eyewitness identification wasn't the crucial issue; rather, it was the ballistics tests on the murder weapon. Prosecution experts, with rather primitive instruments, testified that Sacco's gun was the murder weapon. Defense experts claimed just the opposite. In the end, on July 14, 1921, Sacco and Vanzetti were found guilty; they were sentenced to death.

However, the ballistics issue refused to go away as Sacco and Vanzetti waited on death row. In addition, a jailhouse confession by another criminal fueled the controversy. In 1927, Massachusetts Governor A. T. Fuller ordered another inquiry to advise him on the clemency request of the two anarchists. In the meantime, there had been many scientific advances in the field of forensics. The comparison microscope was now available for new ballistics tests and proved beyond a doubt that Sacco's gun was indeed the murder weapon.

Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in August 1927, but even the new evidence didn't completely quell the controversy. In October 1961, and again in March 1983, new investigations were conducted into the matter, but both revealed that Sacco's revolver was indeed the one that fired the bullet and killed the security guards. On August 23, 1977, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis issued a proclamation that Sacco and Vanzetti had not received a fair trial.
Justice the Issue!
Shall Sacco and Vanzetti Be Judicially Murdered?

The evidence against these two men has been ruled upon by only one man -- Judge Webster Thayer of Massachusetts. Scores of keen legal minds familiar with the record say that the evidence is wholly insufficient. They ask justice for Sacco and Vanzetti.

The two workers were convicted in the midst of the red hysteria of 1921. They hold views opposed by the controlling influences of America.

The issue is not only for Massachusetts. It is for America. The world will judge American ideals of justice on this case.

This case is vital to you -- to all of you who are without friends of influence and wealth. July 10th Sacco and Vanzetti are scheduled to burn in the electric chair. A month from then it may be you, if you agree with them that the organization of society is not perfect.

THE SACCO-VANZETTI DEFENSE COMMITTEE
“What more can these immigrants from Italy expect? It is not every prisoner who has a President of Harvard University throw on the switch for him.”

-- Heywood Broun in N. Y. World

[Broadside against the Sacco-Vanzetti execution], ca. August, 1927. (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05712.02)