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## 130. Bartolomeo Vanzetti's Last Statement in Court (1927)

*Source: Robert P. Weeks, ed., Commonwealth v. Sacco and Vanzetti  
(Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958), pp. 220-23.*

The trial and execution for murder of two Italian immigrant anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, became one of the most controversial events of the 1920s and sparked a worldwide movement to save the condemned men. Their trial in 1921 took place in an atmosphere of anti-immigrant and anti-radical hysteria and was marked by flagrant appeals to prejudice by the prosecution and bias by the presiding judge. To many immigrants, including those who did not share Sacco and Vanzetti's political views, the pair became symbols of the excesses of the anti-immigration movement that culminated in the 1924 law closing off entry for nearly all migrants from southern and eastern Europe. Overseas, the trial led to a transformation of the image of the United States from an asylum for liberty to a land where justice was perverted by the demands of the powerful. After six years of appeals, the two men were sentenced to death in 1927. Vanzetti's last statement in court reaffirmed his innocence and suggested some of the reasons for the verdict.

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WHAT I SAY is that I am innocent. . . . That I am not only innocent of these two crimes, but in all my life I have never stolen and I have never killed and I have never spilled blood. . . . Everybody that knows these two arms knows very well that I did not need to go into the streets and kill a man or try to take money. I can live by my two hands and live well. But besides that, I can live even without work with my hands for other people. I have had plenty of chance to live independently and to live what the world conceives to be a higher life than to gain our bread with the sweat of our brow.

My father in Italy is in a good condition. I could have come back in Italy and he would have welcomed me every time with open arms. Even if I come back there with not a cent in my pocket, my father could have give me a position, not to work but to make business, or to oversee upon the land that he owns. . . .

Not only have I struggled hard against crimes, but I have refused myself of what are considered the commodity and glories of life, the prides of a life of a good position, because in my consideration it is not right to exploit man. I have refused to go in business because I understand that business is a speculation on profit upon certain people that must depend upon the business man, and I do not consider that that is right and therefore I refuse to do that.

Now, I should say that I am not only innocent of all these things, not only have I never committed a real crime in my life—though some sins but not crimes—not only have I struggled all my life to eliminate crimes, the crimes that the official law and the moral law condemns, but also the crime that the moral law and the official law sanction and sanctify,—the exploitation and the oppression of the man by the man, and if there is a reason why I am here as a guilty man, if there is a reason why you in a few minutes can doom me, it is this reason and none else.

We were tried during a time whose character has now passed into history. I mean by that, a time when there was a hysteria of resentment and hate against the people of our principles, against the foreigner, against slackers, and it seems to me—rather, I am positive of



it, that both you [the judge] and Mr. Katzmann [the prosecutor] have done all what it were in your power in order to work out, in order to agitate still more the passion of the juror, the prejudice of the juror, against us. . . . Everybody ought to understand that the first beginning of our defense has been terrible. My first lawyer did not try to defend us. He has made no attempt to collect witnesses and evidence in our favor. . . .

My conviction is that I have suffered for things that I am guilty of. I am suffering because I am a radical and indeed I am a radical; I have suffered because I was an Italian, and indeed I am an Italian; I have suffered more for my family and for my beloved than for myself; but I am so convinced to be right that you can only kill me once but if you could execute me two times, and if I could be reborn two other times, I would live again to do what I have done already.

### Questions:

1. Why does Vanzetti feel that he did not receive a fair trial?
  2. How do Vanzetti's political views come through in his statement?
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