

SACCO AND VANZETTI

A film by Peter Miller

81 minutes, Color & BW, 2005, Video



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SHORT SYNOPSIS:

The heartbreaking story of two Italian immigrant radicals who were executed in 1927 offers insights into present-day issues of civil liberties, the rights of immigrants and the death penalty.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

SACCO AND VANZETTI tells the story of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrant anarchists who were accused of a murder in 1920, and executed in Boston in 1927 after a notoriously prejudiced trial. It is the first major documentary film about this landmark story.

The ordeal of Sacco and Vanzetti came to symbolize the bigotry and intolerance directed at immigrants and dissenters in America, and millions of people in the U.S. around the world protested on their behalf. Nearly eighty years later, the story continues to have great resonance, as civil liberties and the rights of immigrants are again under attack.

SACCO AND VANZETTI brings to life the personal, political, and legal aspects of this heartbreaking story. The powerful prison writings of Sacco and Vanzetti are read by actors John Turturro and Tony Shalhoub. A chorus of passionate commentators propels the narrative, including Howard Zinn, Arlo Guthrie, Studs Terkel, and a number of older people with personal connections to the story. Artwork, music, poetry, and feature film clips about the case are interwoven within the narrative.

Through the tragic story of Sacco and Vanzetti, and the inspiring images of those who keep their memories alive, audiences will experience a universal – and very timely – tale of official injustice and human resilience.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

For the past four years, I've been taken in by the extraordinary story of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. It's very exciting for me to finally finish my documentary and get it out to the public.

Why has this eighty-year-old injustice driven me into debt and kept me up late for years? Perhaps it's because of the inescapable parallels between the story of Sacco and Vanzetti and the post-9/11 crisis in civil liberties. The case clearly has urgent lessons to offer Americans nearly eighty years after its tragic conclusion. As in the "red scare" of Sacco and Vanzetti's time, present-day Americans have allowed fear and jingoism to erode our civil liberties, scapegoat immigrants, and compromise our judicial system. But even without the present-day connections, the story of Sacco and Vanzetti is a subject with extraordinary drama and unforgettable characters that offers a lens for exploring some of the biggest themes in American life.

It's not surprising that their story has attracted some extraordinary artists over the years, including Ben Shahn, Woody Guthrie, Dorothy Parker, Upton Sinclair, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Joan Baez, Diego Rivera, and many others. From the moment I read the incomparable prison letters of Sacco and Vanzetti, I knew that I had to make a documentary about their lives.

More than anything else, I have been drawn to the men who are at the center of the story: two hard-working immigrants, whose passionate belief in building a better world cost them freedom and ultimately their lives. In the time it's taken for me to make this film, I feel that I've come to know these two idealistic men, and that I have learned a great deal from them.

I believe that an understanding of the past is essential for changing society in the present, and I look forward to bringing the story of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti to wide audiences at a time when their message is more important than ever.

PETER MILLER DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

Peter Miller is a documentary filmmaker based in New York. His most recent work, "The Internationale," about the song of socialism and communism, was broadcast on PBS in 2002, nominated for International Documentary Association awards in three categories, won Best Short Documentary at the Woodstock Film Festival, and was on the short list for an Oscar nomination.

Peter has worked as a producer with Ken Burns on numerous projects, including the "Jazz" series, the Peabody Award-winning "Frank Lloyd Wright," and the forthcoming series "The War." He co-produced the labor history documentary "The Uprising of '34" (directed by George Stoney and Judith Helfand), co-produced Julia Newman's "Into the Fire" (about American women in the Spanish Civil War), and produced the award-winning Black Panther documentary "Passin' It On" (directed by John Valadez), which won over twenty film festival prizes including the Grand Prize at the USA Film Festival. He was coordinating producer of Barbara Kopple's Academy Award-winning "American Dream."

His latest film, a documentary about the lives and legal case of Sacco and Vanzetti, took four years to make, and is his first feature as a director.

PRINCIPAL CREDITS

Directed by
PETER MILLER

Produced by
PETER MILLER
AMY CAREY LINTON

Editor
AMY CAREY LINTON

Cinematography
STEPHEN MCCARTHY

Original Music
JOHN T. LABARBERA

Associate Producers
NICOLE OPPER
TOM ROCHE
GREG LINTON

Executive Producer
JESSE CRAWFORD

Voice of Nicola Sacco
TONY SHALHOUB

Voice of Bartolomeo Vanzetti
JOHN TURTURRO

Produced in cooperation with Crawford Communications, Atlanta