

Court Statements Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1927)

In April 1920, two employees of a Massachusetts shoe company were killed during the execution of a payroll robbery. Three weeks later two Italian aliens, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were arrested. In 1920 the United States was still caught up in the hysteria of the Red Scare, and the two men, neither of whom had any previous criminal record, were held primarily because they were admitted anarchists. After a six-week trial, in July 1921 the jury found both men guilty of robbery and murder, in spite of unreliable eyewitnesses and the lack of evidence. The defense continued to fight using motions, appeals, and petitions until 1927, when both men were sentenced to death. They were both executed on August 23, 1927.

To many people, the Sacco and Vanzetti case came to symbolize social injustice. The more vocal of the two, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, frequently corresponded with supporters throughout the world. He issued the statement below at the sentencing phase of his trial in 1927.

Even today, historians continue to debate the guilt or innocence of the two men. At issue is not only the validity of the evidence, but the fairness of the trial. Even modern ballistics tests have been unable to clearly prove guilt or innocence. In 1977, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis pardoned both men.

Statement of Bartolomeo Vanzetti

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 crime that the officials and the official moral condemns, but also the crime that the official moral and the official law sanctions and sanctifies—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 that 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 principle, against the foreigner, against slackers...

Well, I have already said that I not only am not guilty...but I never commit a crime in my life—I have never stole and I have never killed and I have never spilt blood, and I fought against crime and I have fought and have sacrificed myself even to eliminate the crimes the law and the church legitimate and sanctify.

This is what I say: I would not wish to a dog or to a snake, to the most low and misfortunate creature of the earth—I would not wish to any of them what I have had to suffer for things that I am not guilty of. But my conviction is that I have suffered for things 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 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.

I have finished. Thank you.

Statement by Nicola Sacco

. . . I am not an orator. It is not very familiar with me the English language, and as I know, as my friend has told me, my comrade Vanzetti will speak more long, so I thought to give him the chance.

I never know, never heard, even read in history anything so cruel as this Court. After seven years prosecuting they still consider us guilty. And these gentle people here are arrayed with us in this court today.

I know the sentence will be between two class, the oppressed class and the rich class, and there will be always collision between one and the other. We fraternize the people with the books, with the literature. You persecute the people, tyrannize over them and kill them. We try the education of people always. You try to put a path between us and some other nationality that hates each other. That is why I am here today on this bench, for having been the oppressed class. Well, you are the oppressor.

You know it, Judge Thayer,--you know all my life, you know why I have been here, and after seven years that you have been persecuting me and my poor wife, and you still today sentence us to death. I would like to tell all my life, but what is the use? . . . Among that peoples and the comrades and the working class there is a big legion of intellectual people which have been with us for seven years, but to not commit the Iniquitous sentence, but still the Court goes ahead. And I think I thank you all, you peoples, my comrades who have been with me for seven years, with the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and I will give my friend a chance. . . .

Document Analysis

1. In the first paragraph, how does Vanzetti's statement reflect his anarchist beliefs?
2. In the second paragraph, what is the "time that has now passed into history" to which Vanzetti refers?
3. According to Vanzetti, what is he "guilty of"?

Eleanor Rowland Wembridge, "Petting and the Campus," Survey (July 1, 1925)

This article continues to be a popular source for understanding changing sexual mores in the United States. The "Roaring Twenties" have become synonymous with flappers, F. Scott Fitzgerald novels, and the automobile. The era also was characterized by very real differences between generations as young men and women behaved quite differently in courtship than their Victorian parents had. Wembridge's article focuses largely on changing attitudes toward petting and allowable sexual contact before marriage. For many parents, this "decline in morality" was frightening.

. . . Last summer I was at a student conference of young women comprised of about eight hundred college girls from the middle western states. The subject of petting was very much on their minds, both as to what attitude they should take toward it with the younger girls, (being upperclassmen themselves) and also how much renunciation of this pleasurable pastime was required of them. If I recall correctly, two entire mornings were devoted to discussing the matter, two evenings, and another overflow meeting. . . .

Before the conference I made it my business to talk to as many college girls as possible. I consulted as many, both in groups and privately, as I had time for at the conference. And since it is all to be repeated in another state this summer, I have been doing so, when opportunity offered, ever since. . . .

One fact is evident, that whether or not they pet, they hesitate to have anyone believe that they do not. It is distinctly the mores of the time to be considered as ardently sought after, and as not too priggish to respond. As one girl said--"I don't particularly care to be kissed by some of the fellows I know, but I'd let them do it any time rather than think I wouldn't dare. As a matter of fact, there are lots of fellows I don't kiss. It's the very young kids that never miss a chance."

That petting should lead to actual illicit relations between the petters was not advised nor countenanced among the girls with whom I discussed it. They drew the line quite sharply. That it often did so lead, they admitted, but they were not ready to allow that there were any more of such affairs than there had always been. School and college scandals, with their sudden departures and hasty marriages, have always existed to some extent, and they still do. But only accurate statistics hard to arrive at, can prove whether or not the sex carelessness of the present day extends to an increase of sex immorality. . . .

I sat with one pleasant college Amazon, a total stranger, beside a fountain in the park, while she asked if I saw any harm in her kissing a young man whom she liked, but whom she did not want to marry. "It's terribly exciting. We get such a thrill. I think it is natural to want nice men to kiss you, so why not do what is natural?" There was no embarrassment in her manner. Her eyes and her conscience were equally untroubled. I felt as if a girl from the Parthenon frieze had stepped down to ask if she might not sport in the glade with a handsome faun. Why not indeed? Only an equally direct forcing of twentieth century science on primitive simplicity could bring us even to the same level in our conversation, and at that, the stigma of impropriety seemed to fall on me, rather than on her.

Document Analysis

1. What scandalous sexual behavior is Wembridge describing? What does she mean by "sex carelessness" and "sex immorality"?

2. Wembridge is careful to point out that her interviews were conducted exclusively with college girls. How might this approach have affected her conclusions?
3. What does the author mean in the final four sentences?

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John F. Carter, "'These Wild Young People' by One of Them" (1920)

As the United States entered the "Roaring Twenties," it was recovering from World War I, as was the rest of the world. Some members of this "Lost Generation" who had lived through, and sometimes participated in, the horrific violence of the war reacted by questioning traditional values and living their lives in ways that their parents and grandparents often found bewildering. Artists and writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein were exploring new ideas, and it became more popular to live for the moment and explore life's possibilities. The excerpt below succinctly describes the "generation gap" of this era.

For some months past the pages of our more conservative magazines have been crowded with pessimistic descriptions of the younger generation, as seen by their elders and, no doubt, their betters. Hardly a week goes by that I do not read some indignant treatise depicting our extravagance, the corruption of our manners, the futility of our existence, poured out in stiff, scared, shocked sentences before a sympathetic and horrified audience of fathers, mothers, and maiden aunts--but particularly maiden aunts.

In the May issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* appeared an article entitled "Polite Society," by a certain Mr. Grundy, the husband of a very old friend of my family. In kindly manner he

Mentioned our virtues, it is true,

But dwelt upon our vices, too.

"Chivalry and Modesty are dead. Modesty died first," quoth he, but expressed the pious hope that all might yet be well if the oldsters would but be content to "wait and see." His article is one of the best-tempered and most gentlemanly of this long series of Jeremiads against 'these wild young people.' It is significant that it should be anonymous. In reading it, I could not help but be drawn to Mr. Grundy personally, but was forced to the conclusion that he, like everyone else who is writing about my generation, has very little idea of what he is talking about. . . .

. . . Mrs. Katharine Fullerton Gerould has come forward as the latest volunteer prosecuting attorney, in her powerful 'Reflections of a Grundy Cousin' in the August *Atlantic*. She has little or no patience with us. She disposes of all previous explanations of our degeneration in a series of short paragraphs, then launches into her own explanation: the decay of religion. She treats it as a primary cause, and with considerable effect. But I think she errs in not attempting to analyze the causes for such decay, which would bring her nearer to the ultimate truth.

A friend of mine has an uncle who, in his youth, was a wild, fast, extravagant young blood. His clothes were the amazement of even his fastest friends. He drank, he swore, he gambled, bringing his misdeeds to a climax by eloping with an heiress, a beautiful Philadelphian seraph, fascinated by this glittering Lucifer. Her family disowned her, and they fled to a distant and wild country. He was, in effect, a brilliant, worthless, attractive, and romantic person. Now he is the sedate deacon of a Boston Presbyterian church, very strong on morality in every shape, a terror to the young, with an impeccable business career, and a very dull family circle. Mrs. Gerould must know of similar cases; so why multiply instances? Just think how moral and unentertaining our generation will be when we have emerged from the "roaring forties"!--and rejoice.

There is a story, illustrative of Californian civic pride, about a California funeral. The friends and relatives of the departed were gathered mournfully around the bier, awaiting the arrival of the preacher who was to deliver the funeral oration. They waited and waited and waited, but no preacher appeared. Finally, a messenger-boy arrived with a telegram. It was from the clergyman, and informed them that he had missed his train. The chief mourner rose to the occasion and asked

if anyone would like to say a few kind words about the deceased. No one stirred. Finally a long, lanky person got up, cleared his throat, and drawled, "Wa-a-al, if no one else is goin' to speak, I'd like to say a few things about Los Angeles!"

I would like to say a few things about my generation.

In the first place, I would like to observe that the older generation had certainly pretty well ruined this world before passing it on to us. They give us this Thing, knocked to pieces, leaky, red-hot, threatening to blow up; and then they are surprised that we don't accept it with the same attitude of pretty, decorous enthusiasm with which they received it, 'way back in the eighteen-nineties, nicely painted, smoothly running, practically fool-proof. "So simple that a child can run it!" But the child couldn't steer it. He hit every possible telegraph-pole, some of them twice, and ended with a head-on collision for which we shall have to pay the fines and damages. Now, with loving pride, they turn over their wreck to us; and, since we are not properly overwhelmed with loving gratitude, shake their heads and sigh, "Dear! dear! We were so much better-mannered than these wild young people. But then we had the advantages of a good, strict, old-fashioned bringing-up!" How intensely human these oldsters are, after all, and how fallible! How they always blame us for not following precisely in their eminently correct footsteps!

Then again there is the matter of outlook. When these sentimental old world-wreckers were young, the world was such a different place. . . . Life for them was bright and pleasant. Like all normal youngsters, they had their little tin-pot ideals, their sweet little visions, their naive enthusiasms, their nice little sets of beliefs. Christianity had emerged from the blow dealt by Darwin, emerged rather in the shape of social dogma. Man was a noble and perfectible creature. Women were angels (whom they smugly sweated in their industries and prostituted in their slums). Right was downing might. The nobility and the divine mission of the race were factors that led our fathers to work wholeheartedly for a millennium, which they caught a glimpse of just around the turn of the century. Why, there were Hague Tribunals! International peace was at last assured, and according to current reports, never officially denied, the American delegates held out for the use of poison gas in warfare, just as the men of that generation were later to ruin Wilson's great ideal of a league of nations, on the ground that such a scheme was an invasion of American rights. But still, everything, masked by ingrained hypocrisy and prudishness, seemed simple, beautiful, inevitable.

Now my generation is disillusionized, and, I think, to a certain extent, brutalized, by the cataclysm which their complacent folly engendered. The acceleration of life for us has been so great that into the last few years have been crowded the experiences and the ideas of a normal lifetime. We have in our unregenerate youth learned the practicality and the cynicism that is safe only in unregenerate old age. We have been forced to become realists overnight, instead of idealists, as was our birthright. We have seen man at his lowest, woman at her lightest, in the terrible moral chaos of Europe. We have been forced to question, and in many cases to discard, the religion of our fathers. We have seen hideous speculation, greed, anger, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, unmasked and rampant and unashamed. We have been forced to live in an atmosphere of "to-morrow we die," and so, naturally, we drank and were merry. We have seen the rottenness and shortcomings of all governments, even the best and most stable. We have seen entire social systems overthrown, and our own called in question. In short, we have seen the inherent beastliness of the human race revealed in an infernal apocalypse.

It is the older generation who forced us to see all this, which has left us with social and political institutions staggering blind in the fierce white light that, for us, should beat only about the enthroned ideal. And now, through the soft-headed folly of these painfully shocked Grundys, we have that devastating wisdom which is safe only for the burned-out embers of grizzled, cautious old men. We may be fire, but it was they who made us play with gunpowder. And now they are surprised that a great many of us, because they have taken away our apple-cheeked ideals, are seriously considering whether or no their game be worth our candle.

But, in justice to my generation, I think that I must admit that most of us have realized that, whether or no it be worth while, we must all play the game, as long as we are in it. And I think that much of the hectic quality of our life is due to that fact and to that alone. We are faced with staggering problems and are forced to solve them, while the previous incumbents are permitted a graceful and untroubled death. All my friends are working and working hard. Most of the girls I

know are working. In one way or another, often unconsciously, the great burden put upon us is being borne, and borne gallantly, by that immodest, unchivalrous set of ne'er-do-wells, so delightfully portrayed by Mr. Grundy and the amazing young Fitzgerald. A keen interest in political and social problems, and a determination to face the facts of life, ugly or beautiful, characterizes us, as it certainly did not characterize our fathers. We won't shut our eyes to the truths we have learned. We have faced so many unpleasant things already,--and faced them pretty well,--that it is natural that we should keep it up.

Now I think that this is the aspect of our generation that annoys the uncritical and deceives the unsuspecting oldsters who are now met in judgment upon us: our devastating and brutal frankness. And this is the quality in which we really differ from our predecessors. We are frank with each other, frank, or pretty nearly so, with our elders, frank in the way we feel toward life and this badly damaged world. It may be a disquieting and misleading habit, but is it a bad one? We find some few things in the world that we like, and a whole lot that we don't, and we are not afraid to say so or to give our reasons. In earlier generations this was not the case. The young men yearned to be glittering generalities, the young women to act like shy, sweet, innocent fawns toward one another. And now, when grown up, they have come to believe that they actually were figures of pristine excellence, knightly chivalry, adorable modesty, and impeccable propriety. But I really doubt if they were so. Statistics relating to, let us say, the immorality of college students in the eighteen-eighties would not compare favorably with those of the present. However, now, as they look back on it, they see their youth through a mist of muslin, flannels, tennis, bicycles, Tennyson, Browning, and the Blue Danube waltz. The other things, the ugly things that we know about and talk about, must also have been there. But our elders didn't care or didn't dare to consider them, and now they are forgotten. We talk about them unabashed, and not necessarily with Presbyterian disapproval, and so they jump to the conclusion that we are thoroughly bad, and keep pestering us to make us good.

The trouble with them is that they can't seem to realize that we are busy, that what pleasure we snatch must be incidental and feverishly hurried. We have to make the most of our time. We actually haven't got so much time for the noble procrastinations of modesty or for the elaborate rigmarole of chivalry, and little patience for the lovely formulas of an ineffective faith. Let them die for a while! They did not seem to serve the world too well in its black hour. If they are inherently good they will come back, vital and untarnished. But just now we have a lot of work, "old time is still a-flying," and we must gather rose-buds while we may.

Oh! I know that we are a pretty bad lot, but has not that been true of every preceding generation? At least we have the courage to act accordingly. Our music is distinctly barbaric, our girls are distinctly not a mixture of arbutus and barbed-wire. We drink when we can and what we can, we gamble, we are extravagant--but we work, and that's about all that we can be expected to do; for, after all, we have just discovered that we are all still very near to the Stone Age. The Grundys shake their heads. They'll make us be good. Prohibition is put through to stop our drinking, and hasn't stopped it. . . . A Draconian code is being hastily formulated at Washington and elsewhere, to prevent us from, by any chance, making any alteration in this present divinely constituted arrangement of things. The oldsters stand dramatically with fingers and toes and noses pressed against the bursting dykes. Let them! They won't do any good. They can shackle us down, and still expect us to repair their blunders, if they wish. But we shall not trouble ourselves very much about them any more. Why should we? What have they done? They have made us work as they never had to work in all their padded lives--but we'll have our cakes and ale for a' that.

For now we know our way about. We're not babes in the wood. . . . We're men and women, long before our time, in the flower of our full-blooded youth. We have brought back into civil life some of the recklessness and ability that we were taught by war. We are also quite fatalistic in our outlook on the tepid perils of tame living. All may yet crash to the ground for aught that we can do about it. Terrible mistakes will be made, but we shall at least make them intelligently and insist, if we are to receive the strictures of the future, on doing pretty much as we choose now.

Oh! I suppose that it's too bad that we aren't humble, starry-eyed, shy, respectful innocents, standing reverently at their side for instructions, playing pretty little games, in which they no longer believe, except for us. But we aren't, and the best thing the oldsters can do about it is to go into their respective backyards and dig for worms, great big pink ones--for the Grundy tribe are now just about as important as they are, and they will doubtless make company more congenial and

docile than 'these wild young people,' the men and women of my generation.

Document Analysis

1. What role does World War I play in Carter's explanation of the differences between the older and younger generations?
2. How would you describe the overall tone of Carter's article? Make a list of appropriate adjectives.
3. How does this portrayal of the "generation gap" compare with today's differences between your generation and your parents'?

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Prohibition Raid, ca. 1928



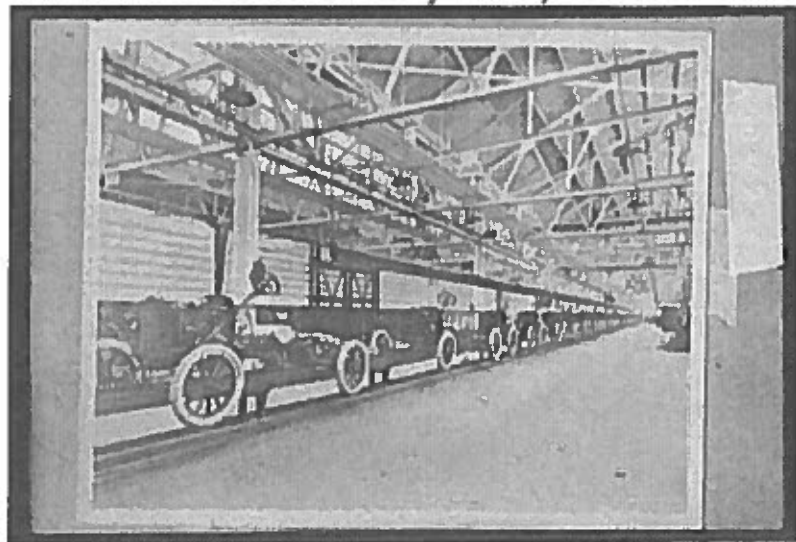
With the onset of Prohibition, illegal liquor became a very profitable business. Here, Detroit police are inspecting equipment found in a clandestine underground brewery. Despite police raids, illegal liquor continued to flow virtually unabated. (*National Archives*)

Thought Questions

1. Why was Prohibition implemented?
2. How successful was it?
3. Why was it so difficult to enforce?
4. When and how was Prohibition ultimately terminated?

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Automobile Assembly Line, 1925



Perfecting by Henry Ford, the assembly line transformed the manufacturing of automobiles and other products, greatly reducing costs and allowing more Americans to purchase cars. (*Library of Congress*)

Thought Questions

1. How did assembly line production differ from earlier manufacturing methods?
2. Were there any drawbacks for the worker using this method?
3. What impact did the automobile have on U.S. culture?

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