“Sacco and Vanzetti, Guilty or Innocent?”

In the early 20th century, America experienced some of the biggest movements of all time including the labor movement, immigration reform, Red Scare, women's rights movement and the most controversial one was, Anarchism; a belief that was frightening to most Americans because anarchism was a totally opposite concept to what Americans believed. They believed in the best government made by the people of America but Anarchism believed in the concept of “propaganda of the deed” which is a kind of terrorist act, acceptable to several people. Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were among the people who believed in this concept and were followers of the Italian anarchist. They defended this movement and promoted many violent revolutionary actions.

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants, were arrested and convicted of robbery and murder in 1920. Nicola Sacco came from southern Italy and became a shoe worker in the shoemaker industry. However, Vanzetti came from northern Italy and became a good friend of Sacco and then both settled in Massachusetts. They believed in the same concept of anarchism and were followers of Galleani. For them, there are no such things as government, authority, police and judges. People are their bosses and are not obliged to do anything under authority. Thus, the government started investigating both Sacco and Vanzetti because they seemed suspicious. They were arrested when they opposed the war in 1920. They were accused of murdering two employees of a shoe factory who were shot dead in the middle of a busy street. The government had a strong claim of Sacco and Vanzetti being murderers because of their history and believed that they were convicted of being anarchists and foreigners.

Many books have been written about the Sacco and Vanzetti process. A lawyer named Felix Frankfurter investigated the case, found little evidence to support the verdict, and claimed that the public prosecutor and judge had played the jury's prejudices. Others have provided evidence that the Morelli gang, not Sacco and Vanzetti, were guilty of the crime. However, some of the authors have written books to confirm that Sacco and Vanzetti were guilty. Likewise, both the traditionalists and revisionists have their opinions about Sacco's and Vanzetti's accusation. Traditionalists support the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti. They did not think that the evidences presented against them were weak. They have strong yet harsh opinions about the immigrants who do not consider them as true citizens of the country and believed them as criminals who were once part of Italy’s biggest mafias but in reality, they had no criminal records. They were involved in different strikes, agitations and were participants in the anti-war propaganda. Such an image of them as an anarchist, put a negative impact on the American Government especially on their trails in 1920. This incident made the traditionist take major steps regarding the immigration policies of the immigrants and declared an Emergency Immigration Act that stopped any further immigration to the United States. The country's traditionalist wanted to focus on the prosperity of its people especially after the war, not outsiders who bring violence to the country like Sacco and Vanzetti. The traditionalists were in favor of the court decision of execution because Sacco and Vanzetti never were in favor of a war that America wanted. They were anarchists and opposed the government in every possible way and Americans especially the traditionalists who had a deep respect for the values, feared groups like socialists and anarchists.

When their case was presented in court, the lawyer changed the nature of the case completely and declared it as a crime that cannot be justified and acknowledged their anarchist believes to confirm their arrest and prosecution. The level of the traditionalist went so down that the judge even called them “Anarchist bastards” during one of the trials. The battle between traditionalism and modernism or radicalism has always been very prominent where they had a sense of hatred for each other. The traditionalists blamed the immigrants for all the sins and crimes, and showed a controlling attitude towards them.

The other kind of people who have different opinions about Sacco and Vanzetti's case are the revisionists who did not show support for the court's decision. They see this as merely unjust because the prosecution did not identify Sacco and Vanzetti to be guilty of the crime they did not commit. It was only their political beliefs and their background that became a reason for their execution. Their radical ideas were not accepted by society and were disturbed because at that time, such ideas were described as non-democratic. All these years, the revisionists have been conducting many kinds of research about this case and according to them, there were insufficient facts about the case which directly prove Sacco and Vanzetti innocent. They say that both Sacco and Vanzetti are poor innocent people who could not harm anybody for their gain. Both indeed belonged to the poor class of immigrants but this is not enough to support the court's decision. Researches have shown that Sacco and Vanzetti were the victims of political interests and cannot be held responsible for the crimes they did not do. Thus, some of the revisionists want to reevaluate the case because it is not only about the beliefs they had but also about their precious lives. Celestino Mederos, a criminal in 1925 confessed that he was involved in the murder of two men and carried out robbery which cleared Sacco's and Vanzetti's names but the court did not approve his confession and stuck to its decision. The traditionalist, on the other hand, did not consider Mederos’ confession and said that it cannot be taken seriously because Mederos himself is a criminal. Revisionists are still trying to prove their point and reexamine the case using modern forensics and become successful in presenting the fact that the weapons used in the crime did not match any of Sacco's and Vanzetti's guns.

After so many years, both traditionalists and revisionists believe that the case was not conducted fairly. Their execution raised many questions about the justice system of America, where two innocent men were not allowed to prove their innocence. They were not given time and the decisions were made based on their historical background. However, the traditionalist point of view cannot be ignored because there are reasons behind their claims. The criminal image of immigrants changed American perspectives about them and therefore, fully supported the judge's decision. The case is still confusing and not clear to most people.