

CHAPTER
12

GUIDED READING *Americans Struggle with Postwar Issues*

Section 1

A. As you read this section, take notes to answer questions about postwar conditions in America and the fear of communism.

After World War I, many Americans feared that Communists would take over the country.

1. How did the Justice Department under A. Mitchell Palmer respond to this fear?	→	2. Why did Palmer eventually lose his standing with the American public?
3. How did the Ku Klux Klan respond to this fear?	→	4. Why did the Klan eventually lose popularity and membership?

Public opinion turned against labor unions as many Americans came to believe that unions encouraged communism.

5. Why was the strike by Boston police unpopular with the public?	→	6. Why did Massachusetts governor Calvin Coolidge become so popular?
7. Why was the strike at U.S. Steel unpopular?	→	8. How did President Wilson respond to the steel strike?

The American labor union movement suffered setbacks as union membership dropped.

B. On the back of this paper, briefly describe how **Sacco and Vanzetti** became victims of the Red Scare. Then explain how **John L. Lewis** improved the lives of coal miners.



Section 1

RETEACHING ACTIVITY *Americans Struggle with Postwar Issues*

Finding Main Ideas

The following questions deal with the issues Americans confronted after World War I.

1. What were the Palmer raids?

2. What did the Ku Klux Klan advocate?

3. How did the quota system limit immigration? Which groups did it hurt the most?

4. What prompted the steel strike of 1919?

5. For what reasons did union membership decline during the 1920s?

6. What unions were open to African Americans?

CHAPTER
12

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from* **Bartolomeo Vanzetti's
Speech to the Jury**

When Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested for murder and robbery in Braintree, Massachusetts, many observers believed the men were convicted because of their radical political views and Italian immigrant backgrounds. What does this excerpt from Vanzetti's last statement to the jury reveal about the trial?

Yes. What I say is that I am innocent, not only of the Braintree crime but also of the Bridgewater crime. That I am not only innocent of these two crimes, but in all my life I have never stole and I have never killed and I have never spilled blood. That is what I want to say. And it is not all. Not only am I innocent of these two crimes, not only in all my life I have never stole, never killed, never spilled blood, but I have struggled all my life, since I began to reason, to eliminate crime from the earth.

Everybody that knows these two arms knows very well that I did not need to go in between the street and kill a man to take the money. I can live with my two arms and live well. But besides that, I can live even without work with my arm 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 not to gain our bread with the sweat of our brow. . . .

Well, I want to reach a little point farther, and it is this—that not only have I not been trying to steal in Bridgewater, not only have I not been in Braintree to steal and kill and have never steal or kill or spilt blood in all my life, not only have I struggled hard against crimes, but I have refused myself the commodity of glory of life, the pride of life of a good position because in my consideration it is not right to exploit man. . . .

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 that the official law 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.

I beg your pardon. There is the more good man I ever cast my eyes upon since I lived, a man that will last and will grow always more near and more dear to the people, as far as into the heart of the people, so long as admiration for goodness and for sacrifice will last. I mean Eugene Debs. . . . He know, and not only he but every man of understanding in the world, not only in this country but also in the other countries, men that we have provided a certain amount of a record of the times, they all stick with us, the flower of mankind of Europe, the better writers, the greatest thinkers, of Europe, have pleaded in our favor. The people of foreign nations have pleaded in our favor.

Is it possible that only a few on the jury, only two or three men, who would condemn their mother for worldly honor and for earthly fortune; is it possible that they are right against what the world, the whole world has say it is wrong and that I know that it is wrong? If there is one that I should know it, if it is right or if it is wrong, it is I and this man. You see it is seven years that we are in jail. What we have suffered during those years no human tongue can say, and yet you see me before you, not trembling, you see me looking you in your eyes straight, not blushing, not changing color, not ashamed or in fear. . . .

We have proved that there could not have been another Judge on the face of the earth more prejudiced and more cruel than you have been against us. We have proved that. Still they refuse the new trial. We know, and you know in your heart, that you have been against us from the very beginning, before you see us. Before you see us you already know that we were radicals, that we were underdogs, that we were the enemy of the institution that you can believe in good faith in their goodness—I don't want to condemn that—and that it was easy on the time of the first trial to get a verdict of guiltiness.

We know that you have spoke yourself and have spoke your hostility against us, and your despisement against us with friends of yours on the train, at the University Club, of Boston, on the Golf Club of Worcester, Massachusetts. I am sure that if the people who know all what you say against us would have the civil courage to take the stand, maybe your Honor—I am sorry to say this because you are an old man, and I have an old father—but maybe you would be beside us in good justice at this time.

When you sentenced me at the Plymouth trial you say, to the best part of my memory, of my good faith, that crimes were in accordance with my principle,—something of that sort—and you take off one charge, if I remember it exactly, from the jury. The jury was so violent against me that they found me guilty of both charges, because there were only two. . . .

We were tried during a time that has now passed into history. I mean by that, a time when there was 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, that both you and Mr. Katzmann has 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. . . .

Well, I have already say that I not only am not guilty of these crimes, but I never commit a crime in my life,—I have never steal and I have never kill and I have never spilt blood, and I have fought against the crime, and I have fought and I have sacrificed myself even to eliminate the crimes that 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 on 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 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 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.

from Osmond K. Fraenkel, *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931). Reprinted in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*, 7th ed., Vol. II (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), 218–219.

Discussion Questions

1. What crimes did Vanzetti maintain that he did not commit?
2. Did Vanzetti believe that Judge Thayer had been fair and impartial? Give evidence to support your response.
3. What accusation did Vanzetti make against the prosecuting attorney, Mr. Katzmann?
4. Vanzetti said he had suffered for his guilt. What “crimes” did he mention?
5. Some people liken the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti to the executions during the Salem witch trials in the 17th century. Do you agree with this comparison? Explain your reasons.

CHAPTER
12

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from Report on the
Steel Strike of 1919*

A Commission of Inquiry appointed at the request of the Interchurch World Movement of North America prepared a report on the steel strike of 1919. The report included affidavits from more than 500 striking and nonstriking steel workers. As you read this portion of the report, consider why investigators recommended that the 12-hour day and 7-day week be eliminated.

It is an epigram of the industry that “steel is a man killer.” Steel workers are chiefly attendants of gigantic machines. The steel business tends to become, in the owners’ eyes, mainly the machines. Steel jobs are not easily characterized by chilly scientific terms. Blast furnaces over a hundred feet high, blast “stoves” a hundred feet high, coke ovens miles long, volcanic bessemer converters, furnaces with hundreds of tons of molten steel in their bellies, trains of hot blooms, miles of rolls end to end hurtling white hot rails along,—these masters are attended by sweating servants whose job is to get close enough to work but to keep clear enough to save limb and life. It is concededly not an ideal industry for men fatigued by long hours. . . .

First, what exactly is the schedule of the twelve-hour worker? Here is the transcript of the diary of an American worker, the observations of a keen man on how his fellows regard the job, the exact record of his own job and hours made in the spring of 1919, before the strike or this Inquiry, and selected here because no charge of exaggeration could be made concerning it. It begins:

“Calendar of one day from the life of a Carnegie steel workman at Homestead on the open hearth, common labor:

“5:30 to 12 (midnight)—Six and one-half hours of shoveling, throwing and carrying bricks and cinder out of bottom of old furnace. Very hot.

“12:30—Back to the shovel and cinder, within few feet of pneumatic shovel drilling slag, for three and one-half hours.

“4 o’clock—Sleeping is pretty general, including boss.

“5 o’clock—Everybody quits, sleeps, sings, swears, sighs for 6 o’clock.

“6 o’clock—Start home.

“6:45 o’clock—Bathed, breakfast.

“7:45 o’clock—Asleep.

“4 P.M.—Wake up, put on dirty clothes, go to boarding house, eat supper, get pack of lunch.

“5:30 P.M.—Report for work.”

This is the record of the night shift; a record of inevitable waste, inefficiency and protest against “arbitrary” hours. Next week this laborer will work the day shift. What is his schedule per week?

Quoting again from the diary:

“Hours on night shift begin at 5:30; work for twelve hours through the night except Saturday, when it is seventeen hours, until 12 Sunday noon, with one hour out for breakfast; the following Monday ten hours; total from 5:30 Monday to 5:30 Monday 87 hours, *the normal week*.

“The Carnegie Steel worker works 87 hours out of the 168 hours in the week. Of the remaining 81 he sleeps seven hours per day; total of 49 hours. He eats in another fourteen; walks or travels in the street car four hours; dresses, shaves, tends furnace, undresses, etc., seven hours. His one reaction is ‘What the Hell!’—the universal text accompanying the twelve-hour day.”

from The Commission of Inquiry, The Interchurch World Movement, Report on the Steel Strike of 1919 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 58–60.

Activity Options

1. Imagine that you are either a steel worker or a steel mill official. Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper stating your opinion on the 12-hour day. Share your letter with the class.
2. Interview someone you know who works full time—a family member, a neighbor, a teacher—about his or her typical work day. Then compare this person’s schedule with that of the steel worker in this excerpt.

CHAPTER
12

Section 1

LITERATURE SELECTION *from The Big Money*
by John Dos Passos

In The Big Money (1936), one of the novels in his trilogy, U.S.A., Dos Passos uses a series of shifting scenes to explore American life. In this excerpt, he focuses on the Sacco-Vanzetti case. The “newsreel” section intersperses news headlines with the lyrics to a song to give a feel for the times. The “camera eye” section records the narrator’s stream-of-consciousness reactions. The paragraphs printed in italics are excerpts from Vanzetti’s prison letters. Judging from this excerpt, how do you think Dos Passos felt about the Sacco-Vanzetti trial?

NEWSREEL LXVI

HOLMES DENIES STAY

A better world’s in birth

Tiny Wasps Imported From Korea In Battle To
Death With Asiatic Beetle

BOY CARRIED MILE DOWN SEWER; SHOT OUT ALIVE

CHICAGO BARS MEETINGS

For justice thunders condemnation

Washington Keeps Eye On Radicals

Arise rejected of the earth

PARIS BRUSSELS MOSCOW GENEVA ADD THEIR VOICES

It is the final conflict

Let each stand in his place

Geologist Lost In Cave Six Days

The International Party

SACCO AND VANZETTI MUST DIE

Shall be the human race.

Much I thought of you when I was lying in the death house—the singing, the kind tender voices of the children from the playground where there was all the life and the joy of liberty—just one step from the wall that contains the buried agony of three buried souls. It would remind me so often of you and of your sister and I wish I could see you every moment, but I feel better that you will not come to the death house so that you could not see the horrible picture of three living in agony waiting to be electrocuted.

THE CAMERA EYE (50)

they have clubbed us off the streets they
are stronger they are rich they hire and fire the
politicians the newspapereditors the old judges the
small men with reputations the collegepresidents
the wardheelers (listen businessmen collegepresidents
judges America will not forget her betray-
ers) they hire the men with guns the uniforms
the policecars the patrolwagons

all right you have won you will kill the brave
men our friends tonight

there is nothing left to do we are beaten
we the beaten crowd together in these old dingy
schoolrooms on Salem Street shuffle up and down
the gritty creaking stairs sit hunched with bowed
heads on benches and hear the old words of the
haters of oppression made new in sweat and
agony tonight

our work is over the scribbled phrases the
nights typing releases the smell of the printshop
the sharp reek of newprinted leaflets the rush for
Western Union stringing words into wires the
search for stinging words to make you feel who are
your oppressors America

America our nation has been beaten by
strangers who have turned our language inside out
who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke
and made them slimy and foul

their hired men sit on the judge’s bench they sit
back with their feet on the tables under the dome
of the State House they are ignorant of our beliefs
they have the dollars the guns the armed forces the
powerplants

they have built the electricchair and hired the
executioner to throw the switch

all right we are two nations

America our nation has been beaten by
strangers who have bought the laws and fenced off

the meadows and cut down the woods for pulp and turned our pleasant cities into slums and sweated the wealth out of our people and when they want to hire the executioner to throw the switch

but do they know that the old words of the immigrants are being renewed in blood and agony tonight do they know that the old American speech of the haters of oppression is new tonight in the mouth of an old woman from Pittsburgh of a husky boilermaker from Frisco who hopped freights clear from the Coast to come here in the mouth of a Back Bay socialworker in the mouth of an Italian printer of a hobo from Arkansas the language of the beaten nation is not forgotten in our ears tonight

the men in the deathhouse made the old words new before they died

If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at streetcorners to scorning men. I might have died unknown, unmarked, a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man as how we do by an accident.

now their work is over the immigrant haters of oppression lie quiet in black suits in the little undertaking parlor in the North End the city is quiet the men of the conquering nation are not to be seen on the streets

they have won why are they scared to be seen on the streets? on the streets you see only the downcast faces of the beaten the streets belong to the beaten nation all the way to the cemetery where the bodies of the immigrants are to be burned we line the curbs in the drizzling rain we crowd the wet sidewalks elbow to elbow silent pale looking with scared eyes at the coffins

we stand defeated America

Research Options

1. Find out more about the life of either Nicola Sacco or Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Then write an obituary that might have appeared in a 1927 newspaper. Include relevant details about either Sacco or Vanzetti's life and death.
2. Find out about another prominent American writer or artist—besides novelist John Dos Passos and poet Edna St. Vincent Millay—who also supported Sacco and Vanzetti. Then explain to the class how this person voiced his or her opinions about the case.

CHAPTER
12

Section 1

LITERATURE SELECTION

“Justice Denied in Massachusetts”
by Edna St. Vincent Millay

*Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote this poem, which was published in *The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems (1928)*, after the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti. As you read the poem, think about its mood.*

Let us abandon then our gardens and go home
And sit in the sitting-room.
Shall the larkspur blossom or the corn grow under
this cloud?
Sour to the fruitful seed
Is the cold earth under this cloud,
Fostering quack and weed, we have marched upon
but cannot conquer;
We have bent the blades of our hoes against the
stalks of them.

Let us go home, and sit in the sitting-room.
Not in our day
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as before,
Beneficent upon us
Out of the glittering bay,
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea
Moving the blades of corn
With a peaceful sound.
Forlorn, forlorn,
Stands the blue hay-rack by the empty mow.
And the petals drop to the ground,

Leaving the tree unfruited.
The sun that warmed our stooping backs and
withered the weed uprooted—
We shall not feel it again.
We shall die in darkness, and be buried in the rain.

What from the splendid dead
We have inherited—
Furrows sweet to the grain, and the weed
subdued—
See now the slug and the mildew plunder.
Evil does overwhelm
The larkspur and the corn;
We have seen them go under.

Let us sit here, sit still,
Here in the sitting-room until we die;
At the step of Death on the walk, rise and go;
Leaving to our children's children this beautiful
doorway,
And this elm,
And a blighted earth to till
With a broken hoe.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the poem's speaker feel after Sacco and Vanzetti are executed?
2. What images best convey the mood of this poem? Give examples.
3. Compare Millay's and Dos Passos's reactions to the Sacco and Vanzetti case.