

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.