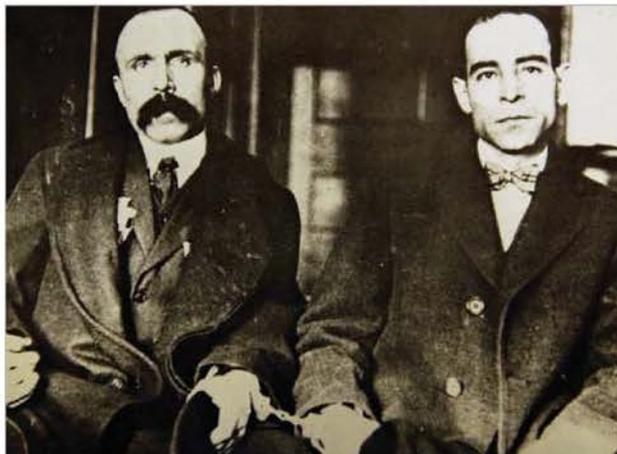


### *Case Study*

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Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco handcuffed in 1923

On Friday, April 15, 1920, in South Braintree, Massachusetts, two men robbed two security guards who were delivering payroll money to the Slater and Morrill Shoe Factory. During the robbery, both guards were fatally wounded by gunshots from the robbers. The robbers then drove off in a black car with the payroll boxes containing \$16,000. Later, police recovered the stolen getaway car and recovered six cartridges from the crime scene. These were later traced back to three ammunition manufacturers: Remington, Peters, and Winchester. Because the same car was implicated in an earlier robbery, the investigation focused on a known thug named Mike Boda. However, he had already fled to Italy by the time the payroll robbery took place. Police then arrested two of Boda's known associates, Italian laborers Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. At the time of their arrest, both were carrying guns and Sacco's was the same caliber, .32 Colt

automatic, as the murder weapon. Sacco was also carrying ammunition made by the same three manufacturers.

Sacco and Vanzetti were tried for the payroll robbery and the murder of one of the security guards. Four bullets had been recovered from the dead guards and experts for the prosecution and defense were retained to determine whether Sacco's .32 Colt pistol was the murder weapon. Not surprisingly, the prosecution experts, though somewhat in disagreement, testified on the whole that Sacco's gun was the murder weapon. The defense experts testified that it was not. It is noteworthy that none of the experts based their opinions on any scientific analysis. None had any formal training in firearms examinations. Ultimately, the jury found Sacco and Vanzetti guilty. They based their opinion in large part on the fact that the bullets that killed the guard were so old and outdated that no one could locate any others except in the possession of Sacco. During the trial, the jurors were furnished with magnifying glasses so that they could view the markings on the bullets.

There was an immediate cry to have the verdict overturned and to set a new trial. The defense hired Albert Hamilton who stated that the murder weapon was definitely not Sacco's, but Hamilton had no real experience or expertise from which to draw these conclusions. Hamilton was a controversial character who had a reputation as someone who would testify to anything he was paid for: a hired gun. The prosecution's expert, Charles Van Amburgh, re-examined the bullet evidence and stuck to his opinion that Sacco's gun fired the fatal bullets. At a hearing to determine whether a retrial was needed, Hamilton brought another gun into court that was the same make and model as Sacco's and tried to exchange the barrels of the two weapons! He was caught by the judge who subsequently denied the motion for a retrial. In 1927, a committee of expert firearms examiners examined the bullet and cartridge evidence and concurred with the prosecution. Even the defense's new expert agreed. Sacco and Vanzetti were executed for the murder. The evidence was re-examined in 1961 and again in 1983 and both supported the conclusions of the 1927 panel. In 1977, however, the governor of Massachusetts issued a proclamation that Sacco and Vanzetti were innocent! The case remains controversial today.



Protests over the guilty verdict and death sentence for Sacco and Vanzetti.