

In the middle of the 1890s a relatively obscure French soldier was accused of treason. By the end of the decade he would be called “the most famous man in the world.” (Burns, vii) Captain Alfred Dreyfus was stripped of rank, arrested, court-martialed and exiled to the French Penile Colony of Devil’s Island. The case for high treason should have been an open and shut one. Either the defendant was guilty of high treason based on the evidence or he was not. The problem was the evidence, the memorandum had no date or signature and no other method of tying Dreyfus to the crime other than it was obviously from within the French military. (Burns, 22)

The case, first and foremost, reflected the anti-Semitism that was prevalent throughout France during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The importance of the Dreyfus case goes much further than the simple guilt or innocence of one man. The nature of the case divided the entire country into supporters of Dreyfus and those whom thought him guilty. This political dichotomy lasted until the retrial of Dreyfus in 1899, and the subsequent clearing of his name. The ripple effect of the Dreyfus Affair lasts to present times, mostly as a warning.

The Dreyfus affair also changed the playing field of politics, the military, and the media. Never before had popular opinion and mass marketed press been able to have such an impact on local matters of government. Had none of the other outcomes existed, this alone would be important enough to remember the Dreyfus Affair.

The case may have polarized the French people generally, but it had profound effects on the lives and the careers of individuals. Theodor Hertzl, a Viennese Jew and journalist, completed his work *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State)

in 1891. By the end of the affair in 1899, he claimed, “the Dreyfus case made me a Zionist.” (Burns, 53)

Another man, Bernard Lazare, worked with Alfred’s brother, Mathieu to educate the populace on the misdeed that the French military had done. Lazare was well aware of the mistrust of the Jews within France and agreed with Mathieu “that without the element of ‘an atrocious and shameful anti-Semitism’” Alfred Dreyfus would have never been sent to Devil’s Island.” (Burns, 75)

Now people like Lazare, who were looking for “Jewish preservation” (Burns, 75) had a face to put within the cause. A non-believer and an anarchist, Lazare held a firm social and commitment to that preservation. He even said that his “re-education into Jewishness” grew out of his frustration with the Dreyfus family and all those French Jews who were paralyzed by anti-Semitism. (Burns, 75)

There is maybe no other single person outside of Alfred Dreyfus’ family whose life was shaped by this affair than Emile Zola. Zola was not drawn to the Affair itself, but the growing mistreatment of the Jews in France. Something that he called “a monstrosity” and a “blind return to barbarism.”(Burns, 83) Zola’s open letters would fuel the public opinion of those calling for Dreyfus’ acquittal (the Dreyfusards) and those delighted to see the French Jew who sold military secrets to the German army rot on Devil’s Island (the anti-Dreyfusards).

Zola’s works drove the wedge further between the two groups. Those groups were not just politically fueled. Burns points out that even French women, who were absent from the Leagues of the Rights of Man, and parliament found ways to show their support for Dreyfus or his accusers. (Burns, 111) Privileged women used

their salons as sounding houses for their beliefs. Those with less money or social rank used the press to comment on the affair. (Burns, 111)

The Affair grew beyond these women, beyond Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards, and even beyond France itself. Europe took notice. Burns says that in 1898 reports came in from foreign manufacturers and suppliers that they were contemplating a "*boycottage*." One German newspaper even wrote, "abstain from visiting the great French Exposition" on the grounds that only the anti-Semitic and chauvinist population write the law, and that they [the German visitors] would not be safe in a country where all rights are violated. (Burns, 159)

The affair affected even the church. Once Dreyfus was cleared and reinstated into the French army, the schism was far from healed. Many Dreyfusard radicals believed that Catholic agents within the army may have been to blame. Emile Combes was one of these individuals, and he had power. As Prime Minister Combes pointed to the affair as a lesson, and "pushed the Chamber toward the paradise of secularization." (Burns, 170)

The separation of church and state had been called for in France before, but there was never any rallying point. The plight and treatment of Alfred Dreyfus was the solidifying strength behind Combes' actions. By 1904 Combes had closed nearly ten thousand religious schools, thousands of priests and nuns had chosen exile over persecution, France had severed diplomatic ties with the Vatican, and the nation was ready for the final Law of Separation. (Burns, 171) The Radicals had called for separation of church and state for decades, the Dreyfus Affair was a powerful catalyst that allowed it to happen this time

The tide of Dreyfusard politics has yet to wash completely back. Very powerful men have used it as examples to learn from. Dreyfus died in 1935. Burns writes that waves of memories over the affair were written and talked about. One account said that Dreyfus had died “at a moment when France seems divided again, as it had been for or against him.” (Burns, 184)

Another, more poignant statement was made by Leon Blum. A former Dreyfusard, and first socialist and Jewish Prime Minister, Blum retraced all the aspects of the Affair, its steps and missteps. Burns says that with Fascism on the rise, Blum called, as a warning, the timidity shown by many Jews in the face of anti-Semitism. (Burns, 184) The next ten years were like nothing they could have ever predicted.

One hundred years after Emile Zola's *J'accuse* addressed the president of the French Republic, the sitting president of the modern French Republic released a letter. President Jacques Chirac's letter, dated January 1998, says, “Today, I would like to tell the Zola and Dreyfus families how grateful France is to their ancestors... they devoted themselves to the values of liberty, dignity, and justice.” (Chirac, Letter on the Centenary of ‘J’Accuse’,”192)

Burns' ends his research with poll results from that same decade. In the 1990s, he says, “nearly 70 percent of the population considered ‘the lessons of the Dreyfus Affair still of present interest.’” (Burns, 192) What does the future hold for France? Burns answers that question with a quote from George Steiner: “With France engaged in a constant spiritual war the Dreyfus case is by no means over yet.” (Steiner, “Totem of Taboo”, 184)

Probably the longest lasting and most far-reaching impact that the Dreyfus Affair had on the world was the power that it gave to the press. Newspapers had been around before the affair, and some had a fair amount of reader's. Some offered political forums and others were printed by specific movements for specific agenda's. These papers along with personally printed pamphlets and fliers would provide fodder for the Dreyfusards and their opposition.

When *Le Matin* published the first public facsimile of the memorandum supposedly written by Drefyus, his brother too the opportunity to have it reprinted with examples of Alfred's handwriting.( Burns, 77) In fact, Burns notes that the German agent, Maximilien von Schwartzkoppen, recognized his agent's handwriting, and had "proof of Dreyfus' innocence...and of Esterhazy's treason."(Burns, 78)

Some of the papers that the "less privileged" women mentioned earlier had at their disposal were *La Fronde*, *La Aurora*, and *Le Siecle*. For every Dreyfusard article that popped up, the Anti-Dreyfusard league had one of their very own printed. All the papers in France carried something about the affair, mostly in the way of political cartoons. Burns shows with Caran d'Ache's "A Family Dinner" published in *Le Figaro*, just how polarizing the issue was. The cartoon shows a family sitting peacefully at the table calling for just one rule: not to discuss the Dreyfus Affair. The second panel shows an all out brawl reflecting the violent riots that were in the streets. The caption simply explains, "They discussed it." (d'Ache, "A Family Dinner, 108)

The most telling of the power of the press both for the Dreyfus Affair and the future of journalism is the representation of Dreyfus' degradation of being stripped

of rank. Burns notes that two papers, *L'illustration* and *Le Petit Journal* published faithful depictions of Dreyfus standing at attention during the process. *Le Quotidien illustre* carried a portrait of the "traitor" with head bowed and body stooped in defeat." (Burns, 56) The latter became of the icons of the whole affair, and it depicted an event that never even happened. Burns reveal that photographs prove this as a fallacy. In fact, many people took notice of how stoic Dreyfus was during the whole affair. Theodor Herzl's account notes, "The strangely resolute attitude of the degraded captain had made a deep impression on many eyewitnesses." (Herzl, "Account of the Dreyfus Degradation," 54-6)

The trial, exile, retrial, and acquittal of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century proved to have solid short-term and powerful long-term affects. Dreyfus gave a face to the raging anti-Semitism that was plaguing France, and most of Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. During the course of the trial and duration of Dreyfus' exile France was split vehemently between the Dreyfusard and Anti-Dreyfusard camps. The power of the press to act as the people's voice of protest either against the military, government, or that "traitor" Dreyfus, and to sway popular opinions had never been more acute. The people's voice was enough to sway the government to reopen the case and call Dreyfus back from exile for a retrial. That was something that rarely occurred, if ever.

Everyone has an opinion on everything that happens in politics. Why should something like the Dreyfus affair have such an impact? Did the French really care whether or not Dreyfus was innocent or guilty, or did they see it as a stripping away of rights? If that was the case, then they new their rights may very well be next.

They people were fighting for themselves. Dreyfus's steadfast and unrelenting belief that right would prevail was something that many of the French populace could find a hope. That hope, or belief in the right, or something similar and very important had to be at stake for the country or the world, in order for a simple court martial to transcend above all those involved and reverberate through time.