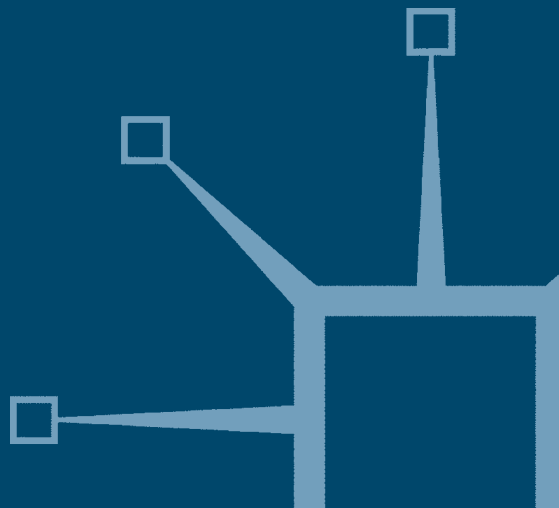


# The Dreyfus Affair

A Chronological History

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George R. Whyte



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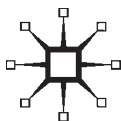
George R. Whyte

# **The Dreyfus Affair**

A Chronological History

Foreword by Sir Martin Gilbert

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Caroline and David  
Gaby, Alix, Aimée and their children to be

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to confront any sign of injustice,  
lest it grows to engulf you*

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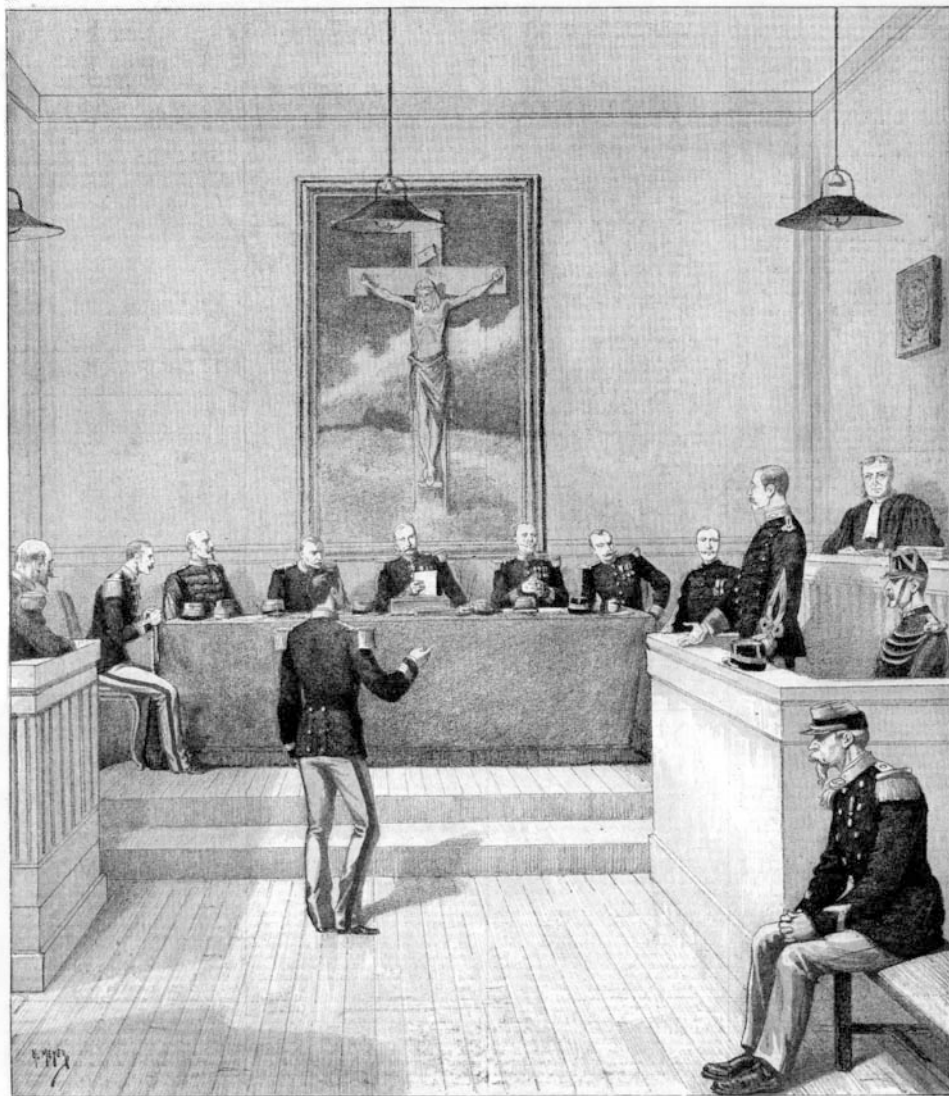
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Le capitaine Dreyfus devant le conseil de guerre

Captain Dreyfus at his court martial in Paris, 1894

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTION USED IN THE NOTES

<i>AD</i>	Leblois, Louis, <i>L’Affair Dreyfus, L’Iniquité, la réparation. Les principaux faits et les principaux documents</i> (Paris: Quillet, 1929).
<i>ATQV</i>	Dreyfus, Mathieu, <i>L’Affaire telle que je l’ai vécue</i> (Paris: Grasset, 1978).
<i>ASD</i>	Thomas, Marcel, <i>L’Affaire sans Dreyfus</i> (Paris: Fayard, 1961).
<i>DFA</i>	Burns, Michael, <i>Dreyfus, a Family Affair</i> (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).
<i>DC</i>	Charpentier, Armand, <i>The Dreyfus Case</i> . Translated from French by J. Lewis May (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935).
<i>DT</i>	Chapman, Guy, <i>The Dreyfus Trials</i> (London: Batsford, 1972).
<i>HAD</i>	Reinach, Joseph, <i>Histoire de l’Affaire Dreyfus</i> (Paris: Edition de la Revue Blanche & Fasquelle, 1901–1911) 7 vols.
<i>Déb. Cass., 1898</i>	<i>La révision du procès Dreyfus à la cour de cassation (27–29 octobre 1898)</i> compte-rendu sténographique ‘in extenso’ (Paris: Stock, 1898).
<i>Cass.</i>	<i>Enquête de la cour de cassation</i> (Paris: Stock, 1899) 2 vols ( <i>Instruction de la chambre criminelle</i> – vol. I; <i>Instruction des chambres réunies</i> – vol. II).
<i>Déb. Cass., 1899</i>	<i>La révision du procès Dreyfus. Débats de la cour de cassation (Rapport de M. Ballot-Beaupré; conclusion de M. le procureur général Manau; mémoire et plaidoirie de Maître Mornard; arrêt de la cour)</i> (Paris: Stock, 1899).
<i>Déb. Cass., 1904</i>	<i>La révision du procès Dreyfus. Débats de la cour de cassation (3–5 mars 1904)</i> (Paris: Ligue française pour la défense des droits de l’Homme et du citoyen, 1904).
<i>3ème Cass.,</i>	<i>Enquête de la chambre criminelle (5 mars–19 novembre 1904)</i> (Paris: Ligues des droits de l’Homme, 1908–1909), 3 vols.
<i>Déb. Cass., 1906</i>	<i>La révision du procès Dreyfus. Débats de la cour de cassation. Chambres réunies. (15 juin–12 juillet 1906)</i> (Paris: Ligue des droits de l’Homme, 1906) 2 vols.
<i>Fabre</i>	<i>L’Instruction Fabre et les décisions judiciaires ultérieures [Le procès du colonel Picquart et de Me Leblois]</i> (Paris: Le Siècle, 1901).

- Pro. Zola*                      *Le Procès Zola devant la cour d'assises de la Seine et la cour de Cassation (7–23 février et 31 mars–2 avril 1898)* compte rendu sténographique ‘in extenso et documents annexes (Paris: Stock, 1898) 2 vols.
- Rennes*                      *Le Procès Dreyfus devant le conseil de guerre de Rennes (7 août–9 septembre)* compte rendu sténographique ‘in extenso’ (Paris: Stock, 1900) 3 vols.
- Répertoire*                      Desachy, Paul, *Répertoire de l’Affaire Dreyfus* (1894–1899), (n.p., n.d. [privately printed] [1905]).
- Révision*                      Guyot, Yves, *La Révision du procès Dreyfus, faits et documents juridiques* (Paris: Stock, 1898).



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## FOREWORD

Winston Churchill was in Paris when the Dreyfus case was at its height. He was 18 years old. 'Bravo Zola!' he wrote to his mother. 'I am delighted to witness the complete debacle of this monstrous conspiracy.'

Familiar though the outlines of the Dreyfus Case may be, the detail is vast and complex, deserving the treatment it is given in these pages. One thing struck me as I read the material that George Whyte and his principal researcher have so patiently and thoroughly pieced together: that even the 'familiar' outlines are often misunderstood or misrepresented.

George Whyte sets the record straight, and in doing so, shows what a landmark and turning point this scandalous episode in French – and European – history was, and how much it needs to be studied today, in the light of all the evidence that he has assembled with such diligence.

Dreyfus, an assimilated Jew, had become a captain on the French General Staff in 1892, and the only Jew in this central part of the French military establishment. Two years later, aged 35, he was tried in secret by a French military court and found guilty of treason. Sentenced to life imprisonment, he was publicly demoted in a degrading ceremony, at which a well-coached crowd fulminated against him and against all Jews. He was then sent to Devil's Island, in French Guyana, off the coast of South America, a harsh, evil place, where he languished for over four grim years. But in France the campaign for justice was growing. In 1899 a second court martial was held. He was still found guilty of treason, but his sentence was reduced from life to ten years (five of which he had already served).

The campaign to assert Dreyfus' innocence and to secure his release continued. Finally, in 1906, a Court of Appeal declared that the evidence against him had no basis in fact. Dreyfus was reinstated in the army and received the Legion of Honour.

George Whyte has done a great service in publishing an annotated, day-by-day, documentary account of that 'monstrous conspiracy', the conviction of a French Jewish officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, on trumped-up charges of espionage for Germany.

The significance of the Dreyfus case spans both Jewish and European history. For Europe, it was a stark revelation of how vicious antisemitism could be, at the highest reaches of civilized Christian society. For Jewish history it showed how essential it was to challenge every manifestation of antisemitic behaviour.

One result of the long struggle to clear Dreyfus' name was the successful defence of Mendel Beilis in the Blood Libel trial in Russia 15 years later. Another was the court case in Switzerland in 1934 at which the forgery of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* was exposed.

An important aspect of this book is the 55 appendices. These begin, rightly and wisely, with the full text of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, issued on 26 August 1789, a pivotal document of the French Revolution at its most humanitarian moment. The appendices include the interrogations of Dreyfus, the verdict of the first court martial, the letter from Dreyfus to the President of the French Republic, sent from the degraded Captain's incarceration on Devil's Island, extracts of Dreyfus' letters to his wife from the island, the official report of his incarceration, extracts from Emile Zola's trial, and the text of two antisemitic songs.

There are many villains in this book, and several heroes. Standing out as a persistent champion of justice is Zola, whose article 'J'Accuse' – an open letter to the French President – first appeared in a special edition of the newspaper *L'Aurore* in 300,000 copies. 'When the truth is buried underground,' Zola wrote, 'it builds up there, it gains the force of an explosion such that, on the day it erupts, it blows up everything with it.'

Zola recognized that in setting out a list of those whom he accused of a miscarriage of justice in the Dreyfus case, he was making himself liable to prosecution. This did not deter him, he explained to the President. 'The action I am taking here,' he noted in his letter, 'is simply a revolutionary way of hastening the explosion of truth and justice. I have only one passion, that of enlightenment, in the name of humanity, which has suffered so much and has a right to happiness. My impassioned protest is only the cry of my soul.'

Zola was tried and sent to prison for this 'cry' of his soul, one more miscarriage of justice along the stony road to fair play. This book shows just how stony – and stormy – that road to justice became.

The shadow of antisemitism hangs over these pages, as it hung over the whole, long evolution of the Dreyfus Case. George Whyte notes how, in three of the Departments of France, directories were in print that listed all Jewish people in the regions and giving their business addresses. Similar lists were to be published four decades later by the Vichy Government of Marshal Pétain. During the antisemitic riots that broke out in France in January 1898 – the very month of Zola's protest – women were urged to boycott Jewish shops.

The Dreyfus case marked a dramatic high-point in the struggle of the soul of the French people. It was a struggle that was to re-emerge in all its fury after the German defeat of France in 1940: between those who found solace in right-wing and fascist values, and those for whom such values were a terrible negation of the French championing of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The case was also a dramatic turning point in the Jewish struggle for fair treatment as a people. Among those who reported on the case from Paris was a Jewish journalist from Vienna, Theodor Herzl. He was shocked by the antisemitic outbursts in France at the time of the trials. If a country as liberal and as cultured as France could spew out

hatred of the Jews, might not the Jewish people be better served by a country of their own?

Dreyfus went on to serve in the French Army in World War I, responsible for the preparation of armaments being sent to the front. His son Pierre fought on the Marne, at Verdun and on the Somme. His nephew Emile was killed by a German shell on the Western Front.

Alfred Dreyfus died in 1935, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and was spared the sight of the renewed, German-fuelled persecutions of French Jewry, and of his own family. His widow was saved from deportation by Catholic nuns who gave her shelter. Several relatives fought in the French Resistance (one, his brother's grandson, was killed while parachuting back into France: the local Pétainist officials refused to bury him). Dreyfus' granddaughter, Madeleine Dreyfus Lévy, was deported to Auschwitz two days after her 25th birthday. She died there a month later.

The story of Dreyfus is both central, and a microcosm, of the story of French Jews. In these pages one can follow that story at its most anguished and intense, crafted by a mastercraftsman.

Martin Gilbert

## Other works by the Author on the Dreyfus Affair

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

### **From Dreyfus to Drancy – The Power of Prejudice**

The chronological format in which this work is presented has been designed to enable the reader to follow, on a day-by-day basis, the evolution of a singular act of injustice into a world affair, its diverse ramifications and, within a broad historical context, gain an insight into its roots, consequences and issues of universal significance. Its aim is to provide an accurate and impartial account of the facts as they are known, the theories and suppositions put forward by historians and commentators, yet leaving the reader to form his or her own conclusions. The appendices serve to illuminate the main issues.

A deliberate miscarriage of justice, masterminded by the army, condoned by its judiciary, fuelled by racial prejudice, political skulduggery and a nascent press combined to create the Dreyfus Affair. Various classified as a French affair, a Military affair, a Family affair, a Jewish affair – it was all of these and more.

The Dreyfus Affair went far beyond the confines of France at the turn of the 20th century, beyond too, the story of the innocent Captain Alfred Dreyfus, an unwanted Jew on the French General Staff. It was a series of events that brought into the spotlight a host of political, social and moral issues. It split France in two, saw the emergence of the intellectual and the engagement of the citizen and paved the way for new forms of civic and political expression. Its repercussions were and remain worldwide. Further afield, the Affair became a crucible for a host of human rights issues such as racism and the rights of the individual against the organs of State. Today, the Affair remains a touchstone for issues of primary importance for our societies.

An injustice becomes an affair when social passions and conflicting ideologies are aroused. France was torn by conflict – friends and relatives clashed, every dinner party and street corner became a battleground. The country was in turmoil. Society was divided, families were split. Dreyfusards clashed with anti-dreyfusards. Violence was in the air. Antisemitic riots ravaged the cities of France. An emerging media, flexing its muscles for the battles of the 20th century, propelled the fate of one soldier into history and the Affair shed its light and cast its shadow into every home in France and eventually abroad.

'Death to the Jews' drowned the protests of Alfred Dreyfus during his public degradation as he was stripped of his rank, his honour and ironically, the emblems of the very ideals which had guided his life, love of the army and devotion to the Patrie. His calvary was to last 12 years and the Affair it precipitated was to become one of the most troubled periods in the history of France, recording for future generations the far seeing testimony of the social turbulence of the times and its implications for the century to follow. The scene of this



drama was set by two historical events many centuries apart: the humiliating defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and the appearance of the Gospels 1800 years earlier.

The defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War dealt a grievous blow to the pride of the nation. The army became the sacred instrument of revenge. It would recapture the lost territories of Alsace-Lorraine and regain France's honour. The army was revered, it was beyond reproach. It was the hallowed institution whose General Staff Alfred Dreyfus joined as a probationary officer in 1893.

The influx of foreigners and Jews into France in the second half of the 19th century met with mounting antagonism from the populace and in an atmosphere of growing xenophobia the slogan 'France for the French' became paramount. Antisemitism gathered pace when the writer Edouard Drumont, who was to become known as the 'Pope of Antisemitism', arrived on the scene. The Catholic Church and the Assumptionist daily *La Croix* had long maintained an anti-Jewish stance and the venom of Drumont would drive their bigotry to fever pitch. 'To be French was to be Catholic'. All others, especially Jews, were suspect. These undercurrents – France's defeat by Germany, reverence for the army and mistrust of the Jew – were to converge in the Affair and burst the dams of all social restraint, creating a torrent of hate and abuse on an unprecedented scale.

The Affair's galaxy of dramatis personae – as Pierre Dreyfus (the son of Alfred) described its main protagonists – exhibited the whole gamut of human virtues and failings. General Mercier, the intransigent Minister of War who, for reasons never discovered, continued to affirm the guilt of Dreyfus long after he was declared innocent; the courageous Lieutenant-Colonel Picquart, not without his own prejudices, whose devotion to truth, 'the greatest service I can render my country', took precedence over his obedience as an army officer; Emile Zola, who turned the tide of history with his audacious 'J'Accuse', the first mediatic response to an injustice and history's most famous plea for human rights; Edouard Drumont, whose ranting antisemitism became a rallying cry of hatred; Major Henry whose devotion to the army was rooted in dishonesty and the dissolute Major Esterhazy who proudly asserted that he 'only lied on orders' and whose pliable morality made him the ideal servant of a morally corrupt General Staff. And then, Lucie Dreyfus, a paragon of loyalty striving to survive as the reviled wife of a traitor; Mathieu Dreyfus, the 'good' and devoted brother, steadfast in his mission to exonerate Alfred. And the central character, exiled from his Affair on Devil's Island, in solitary confinement, stoically enduring his mental and physical torture, unaware of the passions his fate had unleashed which were tearing his country apart – a victim of his own illusions, never understanding that he was the unwanted Jewish officer, the unwelcome intruder. Paradoxically, his world contracted as the Affair expanded and, as perceived by Hannah Arendt, the dramas of 20th-century France went into rehearsal.

In the world beyond Devil's Island an anxious Europe was awaiting the day of reckoning. Alliances were being forged but trust was at a low ebb; espionage and counter-espionage were rife. The reader, when embarking on a study of the Affair, is well advised to remember Esterhazy's dictum: 'in espionage and counter-espionage nothing is as it seems to be'. Therein lie the fascination and frustrations of the Affair. Information collides with misinformation; the absence of information is compensated by a plethora of credible and incredible theories. Lies, forgeries, duplicity and cover-ups were the rule of the day in a 'kaleidoscopic' affair whose shifting elements allow any number of configurations.

However the reader navigates this quagmire of contradictions – whose evaluation becomes a personal choice – he will reach the unresolved questions which lurk at the heart of the Affair. Who wrote the *bordereau* and why? What did Henry know that necessitated his death, and who was the person he indicated in his letter to his wife Berthe just before he died, 'you know in whose interest I acted'? What was the 'terrible secret' that Esterhazy recalled on his death bed and which guaranteed his protection by the General Staff, whatever the circumstance, but demanded his exile, never to set foot in France again? Were the two men guardians of the same secret? Was there a high-ranking 'officer X', as suggested by Paléologue, who was a spy and whose identity had to be kept secret at all cost? These are unfinished chapters which will no doubt continue to attract further investigation. Meticulous research in Russian, Italian and German archives may yield some clues.

The Affair was not without its visionaries. Zola, horrified by the eruption of antisemitism addressed his letters to France and to France's youth:

*France, you have allowed the rage of hatred to lash the face of your people, poisoned and fanatic they scream in the streets 'Down with the Jews', 'Death to the Jews'.*

*What sorrow, what anxiety at the dawn of the 20th century.*

George Clemenceau, foreseeing the emergence of the totalitarian state, warned:

*when the right of a single individual is injured, the right of all is in peril, the right of the nation itself.*

But Drumont had preceded them. Planting the signpost which would eventually lead to Drancy, he predicted with spine-chilling accuracy:

*the Jews must be eternally blind as they have always been not to realise what is awaiting them. They will be taken away as scrap ... The leader who will suddenly emerge will have the right of life and death ... he will be able to employ any means that suit his purpose. The great organiser will achieve a result which will resound throughout this universe.*

The appearance of the Gospels, which led to the accusation of deicide against the Jewish people, marked the genesis of the longest libel in

history. Enriched by groundless accusations and calumnies over the centuries, poisoning of wells, Satanic practices, taking the blood of Christian children for Passover, a Jewish stereotype emerged, a Judas figure, increasingly despised and increasingly embedded into the culture of Christian Europe. The Jews, a defenceless minority, were never in a position to challenge these allegations and unchallenged allegations harden into fact. The Jews became, by definition, guilty. As in the case of Alfred Dreyfus, evidence never reached the scales of justice but was moulded to corroborate the prejudice.

Dreyfus was doubly betrayed. Firstly, the collective conscience of his judges responded more to Jesuit indoctrination and unquestioning obedience to army discipline than the call of justice; secondly, after the callous Rennes verdict, an ignoble pardon was followed by a hurried amnesty bill in 1900 to close the unfinished chapters and stifle the embarrassing course of justice.

Nevertheless, the Dreyfus Affair was a turning point in French and European history and triggered many major developments: the strengthening of the Republic; the separation of Church and State; the power of the media and its manipulation of public opinion; Herzl's vision of a Jewish State and his manifesto *Judenstadt*. It paved the way for the publication of the fraudulent *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, consolidated anti-Jewish sentiments and laid the groundwork for the excesses of Vichy France.

Above all, the Affair was a warning signal highlighting the fragility of human rights in our most 'developed' societies. Although it is arguable whether antisemitism was the most significant aspect of the Affair, it was this aspect whose significance became paramount in the century that followed, when human rights were desecrated to the point of annihilating a whole people. It is therefore vital to examine the power of prejudice and its mechanism, as revealed in the Dreyfus Affair.

Dreyfus recalls in his diary how, as a young boy, he cried with sadness as he watched the German Army march into his home town Mulhouse during the Franco-Prussian War. He swore to become a soldier and drive the enemy from his country. He kept his promise and began the hazardous march of an assimilationist Jew to become a successful French officer, trespassing the threshold of tolerance in a bigoted terrain which was to lead him to his calvary. At the age of 35 he was a captain in the French Army and posted to the General Staff. For him, his Judaism was unimportant – for his adversaries it was all important. He did not or would not recognize that admission was not acceptance and thereby became an accomplice to his own martyrdom.

How often did Dreyfus experience expressions of antisemitism and how often did he ignore its warnings? Did he really not realize that he was living in a society in which antisemitism had become part of its fabric? Did he not read Drumont's rantings which perpetuated the

calumnies levelled at Jews since the dawn of Christianity? Was he not aware of the editorials in *La Libre Parole* warning against their admission into the army? Dreyfus tried to ignore these impediments and paid for his illusions with degradation, imprisonment and exile. And although, in a unique moment of history, the injustice to one Jew became a world affair, its lessons in the vast arena of human rights have remained unlearned.

Rumblings of the Affair continued and do so to this day. The first war passed with its horrors, to be surpassed by the second with its atrocities. Members of the Dreyfus family fought valiantly, served in the Resistance and died, other family members were deported in the transports from Drancy to Auschwitz where they perished. The venomous 'Death to the Jews' was transformed into reality.

History and the passage of time have made the Dreyfus Affair a Rorschach test for all those who come into contact with it. It exposes bigotry, hypocrisy and guilt with unnerving clarity. Set in a drama where prejudice prevailed over reason, the victory of justice was finally achieved at the price of great personal suffering and national shame. In its struggle for human rights the Affair reached heroic proportions, and in the writings of Charles Péguy, a mystical dimension.

Dreyfus was exonerated of all the charges against him except that of being a Jew, and in 20 years of research and reflection on the Affair, its most penetrating summary came from a Parisian taxi driver whom I asked what he knew about the Dreyfus Affair: 'Ah, Monsieur,' he explained, 'a strange story. It was all about a French officer who was accused of being Jewish.'

George R. Whyte  
Chairman – The Dreyfus Society for Human Rights  
April 2005

## GUIDE TO THE CHRONOLOGY

The Chronology has been structured to help the reader around a complex web of information. Part 1 is intended primarily for those unfamiliar with the history of the late nineteenth century or who are coming to the Affair for the first time. It introduces some of the main political and cultural events from the French Revolution of 1789 to the Affair proper. Its aim is to outline some of the themes crucial to the development of the Affair – the increase in Franco–German rivalry, the development of espionage and counter-espionage, the fragile hold of the Third Republic, France's stance vis-à-vis her Jewish population – and places the history of the Dreyfus family, and to some extent the other protagonists of the Affair, within the context of these historical strands.

The main focus of this volume, however, is the historical period between 1894 and 1906 that saw the arrest, conviction, deportation and eventual rehabilitation of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. This period is covered in Parts 2 – 9 of the Chronology. Inevitably, these sections bear the weight of the book, and cover events in far more detail than the first and last sections.

The final part, Part 10, deals with the aftermath, memories and perceptions of the Affair up to the present day. It covers the fate of the Dreyfus family during World Wars I and II, the expansion of nationalist movements in France, which had their origins in the Dreyfus Affair, the authoritarian regime of Vichy France (1940–44). Also emphasized is the fate of Jews in France during World War II, as well as an ongoing debate over the role of religious minorities, racism, xenophobia and antisemitism.

The chronological text and the section endnotes play different roles in this work. The intention has been to allow the main body of the Chronology to relate contemporary events as they unfold, without comment; the notes, on the other hand, offer interpretation, comment and supplementary information either not available at the time or developed since; they also point to historical debates, past and present, provide source references and suggest further reading.

The appendices have been selected with the aim of either elucidating or developing points described, mentioned or alluded to in the main body of the Chronology. Many are taken from sources previously unpublished in English.

To present the events of this complex Affair as they happened day by day has demanded some compromises; sometimes it was necessary to deviate from a strict chronological approach and group events sequentially into a series of parallel events. The various trials and investigations, for example, fall into this category. To maintain a rigidly chronological approach would have meant that the reader could not have followed the progress of a given thread. One series of parallel events inevitably overlaps with others, and also with events taking place simultaneously but outside the series of 'parallel' events.

Various visual devices have been used to help the reader distinguish the interlocking elements of the Chronology. Events relating to Dreyfus' sojourn on Devil's Island, as distinct from the development of the Affair elsewhere, are presented as tinted text areas. Events that unfold simultaneously and in parallel to events documented earlier or subsequently are indicated by sets of parallel rules. Other events, movements or developments that influenced or created a political or cultural situation are set within the Chronology and are slightly separated from the running text by additional spacing.

In the main body of the Chronology, extracts quoted in English from the original French are the author's own translations unless otherwise stated. Bibliographical references are to the original French in such cases. When the historical information in the main body of the Chronology does not involve a translation, the notes refer to the English editions of books translated from foreign languages. The translations given here retain the spirit of the original sources, but are also faithful and accurate renderings of the sources: the balance is often difficult to strike, especially as the literary styles and the formalities of behaviour are unfamiliar to readers of the 21st century.

There are slight variations in the spelling and presentation of proper names at the time of the Affair and later. In the Chronology itself, spellings have been standardized for the sake of clarity; in quotations from original sources however, and in the Appendices, the original spelling and punctuation have been retained. Titles and their translation follow the sources of documentation.

Wherever possible, the notes direct the reader to the original source; but a reference is also given where this source is reproduced in Louis Leblois, *L'Affair Dreyfus, L'Iniquité, la réparation. Les principaux faits et les principaux documents* (Paris: Quillet, 1929), to direct the reader to this significant compilation of sources, accessible in various libraries around the world.

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