

These opponents of the Third Republic included monarchists who wanted a king, Bonapartists longing for a Napoleonic empire, Catholics disturbed by republican efforts to curb the political power of the Church, and aristocrats opposed to democracy.

To understand the opposition to the Third Republic in France after 1871, it is essential to remember that “republicanism” in France meant more than “no king, no emperor.” Rooted in the radical Jacobin Republic of 1792 (see Chapter 20), republicanism rested on a vision of an ideal France of male equals—small shopkeepers and independent artisans—governed by reason, not religion. Such a vision clashed with the interests and ideals of monarchists, Bonapartists, and Catholics. The clash of these rival ideologies generated chaos in French politics.

The Dreyfus Affair revealed the lack of consensus about the nature of France. (See *Justice in History* in this chapter.) In 1894, a French military court wrongly convicted Captain Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935) of espionage. French intellectuals took up Dreyfus’s case, and supporters and opponents of Dreyfus battled in the streets and the legislature. Support for Dreyfus, who was Jewish, became equated with support for the secular ideals of the Republic. The anti-Dreyfusards, in contrast, saw the affair as a symptom of everything wrong with the Republic. They believed that true French nationalism should center on Catholicism and respect for the military.

In some ways, the supporters of Dreyfus—and therefore of the Republic—won. Dreyfus was declared “not guilty” in 1906, and the government placed the army under civilian control and removed the Catholic Church from its privileged position. With these measures politicians aimed to separate citizenship from religious affiliation and unite the nation around the ideal of a secular Republic. In 1914, on the eve of World War I, the Third Republic was thus stronger than it had been two decades earlier.

It had not yet, however, gained the approval of all of French society. Royalist and Catholic opposition remained strong, and working-class

disaffection was growing. The Radical Party, which represented the interests of small store-owners and independent craftsmen, not industrial workers, dominated political life and drew its support from rural and small-town constituencies. The Radicals opposed the high taxes necessary to establish social welfare programs and dragged their feet on social legislation such as the ten-hour workday (not passed until 1904) and old-age pensions (not established until 1910). As a result, French workers increasingly turned to violence.

RUSSIA: REVOLUTION AND REACTION In the sprawling Russian Empire, the task of nation-making was immense, but well underway by 1914. The “Great Reforms” of the 1860s—including the emancipation of 50 million serfs, the creation of a new judicial system, and the vesting of local governmental authority in elected assemblies (for which 40 percent of the peasantry was able to vote)—energized Russian provincial and press culture and enlivened local politics. As new opportunities arose for lawyers, clerks, shopkeepers, accountants, journalists, and the like, the middle classes expanded. The industrialization program of Tsar Alexander III (r. 1881–1894) accelerated the pace of change by creating a small but significant industrial working class which had, by 1895, a literacy rate approaching 70 percent and thus access to the liberal and socialist political ideas that many in the middle classes promoted.

Such ideas clashed with the absolutist convictions of the tsarist regime. Convinced that God had appointed them to rule, Alexander III and Nicholas II (r. 1894–1917) clung to absolutism. To catch up with the West, the tsarist regime adopted Western industrialization but had no intention of accepting Western ideas of representative government. It could not, however, completely block the flow of these ideas into the Russian Empire. Nor could it stamp out the social upheaval created by economic change. Rapid state-imposed industrialization produced cities simmering with discontent. Factory workers labored eleven hours a day in poor conditions,

JUSTICE IN HISTORY

The Dreyfus Affair: Defining National Identity in France

On September 27, 1894, French counterespionage officers examined a disturbing document—an unsigned, undated cover letter for documents containing information on French military equipment and training. The officers concluded that the letter was intended for the German military attaché in Paris. This torn piece of paper was evidence of treason. Someone in the French officer corps was selling military secrets to the Germans.

After a brief investigation and a cursory comparison of handwriting samples, the French investigators concluded that the traitor was Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a candidate officer on the General Staff. An unlikely traitor, Dreyfus had compiled a strong record during his military career and, by all accounts, was a staunch French patriot. Moreover, because his wife was wealthy, he had no need to sell his country for money. He was, however, an aloof and arrogant man, disliked by most of his fellow officers. He was also a Jew.

Despite the lack of solid evidence, Dreyfus was convicted of treason and exiled in 1895 to Devil’s Island, a former leper colony twelve miles off the coast of French Guyana in the Caribbean. Many believed he had gotten off too lightly. Public and press clamored for his execution.

The case seemed closed. But some months later, the new chief of the Intelligence Bureau, Major Marie-Georges Picquart, discovered that someone was continuing to pass military secrets to the Germans. Ignoring his superiors’ instructions to leave the Dreyfus case alone, Picquart set out to trap the man he believed to be Dreyfus’s accomplice. The evidence he uncovered, however, convinced him that Dreyfus was innocent.

Picquart’s efforts created a national crisis. On January 13, 1898, one of France’s most famous authors, Émile Zola, alleged in a Paris newspaper that the French military was engaged in a cover-up. In an article headlined “*J’accuse!*” (“*I accuse!*”),

Zola charged that the General Staff had deliberately convicted an innocent man. Over the next six weeks, riots broke out in French cities.

Retried before a second military court in 1899, Dreyfus was again found guilty—this time “with extenuating circumstances,” a ridiculous verdict (there were no extenuating circumstances for treason) concocted to salvage the military’s position despite Dreyfus’s obvious innocence. In the subsequent riots in Paris, 100 people were wounded and 200 jailed. Ten days later, the French president pardoned Dreyfus to heal the divisions opened by the trial. Finally, in 1906, a French high court exonerated Dreyfus. Not until 1995, however, did the French military acknowledge his innocence.

The Dreyfus Affair drew international attention, polarized French politics, and tore apart Parisian society. It sparked violent protests, duels, and trials for assault, defamation, and libel. To uphold Dreyfus’s conviction, high-ranking military officials falsified evidence and forged documents. The question “Are you for or against Dreyfus?” divided families and destroyed friendships. During the height of the controversy, for example, the painter Edgar Degas ridiculed Camille Pissarro’s paintings. When reminded that he had once admired these same works, Degas said, “Yes, but that was before the Dreyfus Affair.” Degas was a passionate anti-Dreyfusard; Pissarro believed Dreyfus was innocent.³

Why did the Dreyfus Affair change one painter’s perception of another’s work? Why was this trial not simply a case, but an *affair*, a matter of public debate and personal upheaval, rioting and political turmoil?

To comprehend the Dreyfus Affair, we must understand that it was less about Captain Alfred Dreyfus than about the very existence of the Third Republic, founded in 1871 in the wake of military defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the collapse of Napoleon III’s empire. The

intellectuals and politicians who supported Dreyfus were defending the Republic. These men and women linked monarchy and empire to national disaster rather than national glory. They sought to limit the army's involvement in France's political life and upheld a secular definition of the nation that treated Catholics no differently from Protestants, Jews, or atheists.

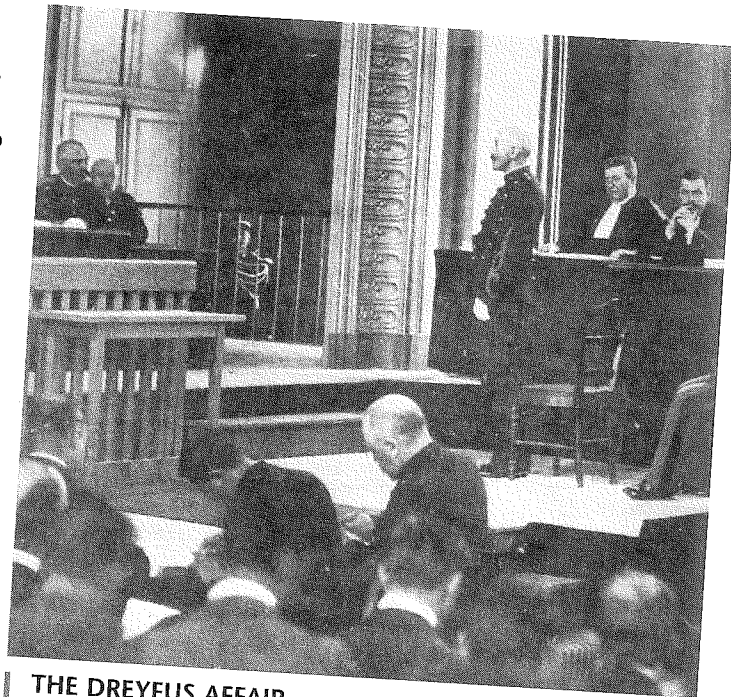
Dreyfus's opponents, in contrast, regarded the Third Republic as a betrayal of the true France. They wanted a hierarchical, Catholic, imperial state, steeped in military traditions. By defending the military conviction of Dreyfus, they supported the army and the authoritarian traditions that the Republic had jettisoned. The Dreyfus Affair was thus an encounter between competing versions of French national identity.

The question "What is France?" however, could not be answered without considering a second question: "Who belongs in France?"—or more specifically, "What about Jews?" France's small Jewish community (less than 1 percent of the population) had enjoyed the rights of full citizenship since 1791—much longer than in most of Europe. Yet the Dreyfus Affair showed that even in France, the position of Jews in the nation remained uncertain. Although anti-Semitism played little role in the initial charges against Dreyfus, it quickly became a dominating feature of the affair. Anti-Semitic politicians and publications led the anti-Dreyfus forces and more than 70 anti-Semitic riots ravaged France. For many anti-Dreyfusards, Dreyfus's Jewishness explained everything. The novelist and political theorist Maurice Barrès insisted, "I have no need to be told why Dreyfus committed treason.... That

Dreyfus is capable of treason I conclude from his race."⁴

Anti-Semites such as Barrès regarded Jewishness as a kind of hereditary disease that made Jews unfit for French citizenship. To the anti-Semitic nationalist, the Jew was a person without a country, unconnected by racial or religious ties to the French nation—the opposite of a patriot. A symbol of rootlessness, "the Jew" represented the forces of economic and political change that appeared to be weakening France. Anti-Semites pointed to the successes of assimilated Jews such as Dreyfus—in the army, the universities, the professions, and business—as evidence of what they saw as the threat of Jewish "domination" of French culture.

Dreyfus survived to serve his country with distinction in the First World War. Like Dreyfus, the Third Republic survived the Dreyfus Affair. It was probably even strengthened by it. Outrage over



THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

Captain Alfred Dreyfus before his judges, 1899.

the army's cover-up led republican leaders to limit the powers of the military and so lessened the chances of an anti-republican coup. Anti-Semitism, however, remained pervasive in French politics and cultural life well into the twentieth century.

For Discussion

1. What does the Dreyfus Affair reveal about definitions of national identity in late-nineteenth-century Europe?
2. Once Dreyfus was convicted, many French men and women believed that for the sake of the national interest, his conviction had to be upheld—whether he was actually guilty or not. In what situations, if any, should "national

interest" override an individual's right to a fair trial?

Taking It Further

- Begley, Louis. *Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters*. 2009. Begley, a novelist and a lawyer, uses the history of the Dreyfus Affair to reflect on contemporary political and legal issues.
- Burns, Michael. *France and the Dreyfus Affair: A Documentary History*. 1999. An accessible collection of primary documents.
- Kleeblatt, Norman, ed. *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*. 1987. This richly illustrated collection of essays explores the cultural, political, and legal impact of the case.

but both strikes and unions were illegal. In the countryside, heavy taxation and rapid population growth increased competition for land and intensified peasant discontent.

In 1905, popular discontent flared into revolution. That year Japan trounced Russia in a war sparked by competition for territory in Asia. The military disaster of the Russo-Japanese War revealed the incompetence of the tsarist regime and provided an opening for reformers to demand political change. On a day that became known as "Bloody Sunday" (January 22, 1905), 100,000 workers and their families attempted to present to the tsar a petition calling for higher wages, better working conditions, and political rights. Troops fired on the unarmed crowd. At least 70 people were killed and more than 240 wounded. The massacre strengthened the call for revolution. Across the empire, workers went on strike and demanded economic and political rights. In June, parts of the navy mutinied. By the fall, Russia was in chaos and in October, Tsar Nicholas II gave in to demands for the election of a national legislative assembly, the Duma. Yet the revolution

continued. In December a military mutiny sparked an uprising in Moscow. As buildings burned and street battles raged, revolutionary socialists controlled parts of the city.

By the time the first Duma met in April of 1906, however, tsarist forces had regained the offensive and terrorized much of the opposition. Because most of the army remained loyal, the tsarist regime was able to quell the Moscow uprising by December 17 and then move to suppress revolutionary forces across the empire. But just as importantly, the violence and radicalism of the Moscow uprising horrified middle-class liberals, who now refused to cooperate with revolutionary or socialist groups. Nicholas succeeded in limiting the Duma's legislative role and, by 1907, regained many of his autocratic powers.

The Revolution of 1905, then, did not overthrow the tsarist regime or transform it into a limited monarchy. Yet it was not a complete failure. Trade unions, strikes, and political parties remained legal. The Duma, limited as it was, did exist. Although not an independent legislative branch of government, it helped