

## The Dreyfus Affair: Enduring CI Lessons

***Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters***, by Louis Begley. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xvi + 250 pp., notes, index.

***For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus***, by Frederick Brown. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), xxv + 304 pp., notes, index.

***Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century***, by Ruth Harris. (New York: Henry Holt, 2010), xvii + 542 pp., notes, bibliography, index.

### John Ehrman

---

Officers new to counterintelligence (CI) and overwhelmed by the scope of what they need to learn often ask the same question: “Where do I start?” The best place might be the Dreyfus affair. The tale of French Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus, his wrongful conviction for treason, and how the argument about his guilt plunged France into turmoil is as dramatic and riveting as any true story can be. Just as important, it took place at the dawn of the modern intelligence era, when governments were forming the permanent, professional intelligence services that we know today. Its timing made the affair not only the first modern CI case but also the first modern CI disaster—that is, not just an investigative and legal error, but one that spilled over from the intelligence world into the sphere of mass politics, with consequences for culture and society as well.

Is there anything new to be learned about the Dreyfus affair? More than 115 years have passed since Dreyfus was convicted of treason, and it has been more than a century since he was exonerated. With the facts of the case long settled, the archives thoroughly mined, and hundreds of books and articles published, it would seem unlikely that there is much left to be discovered or said. As the appearance of three new books within a year indicates, however, scholars still can find new ways to look at the affair and draw fresh insights from it.

*Editor's Note: Readers familiar with the events are welcome to jump to the reviews of the three new works on the subject, beginning on page 26, at “The Irresistible Topic.” Those new to or only slightly familiar with the case will want to read on to make the reviews more meaningful.*

### ***An Apparent Success***

The Dreyfus affair began, ironically, as an outstanding CI success. After the disaster of the Franco-Prussian War and collapse of the Second Empire in 1870, France began to develop a modern military intelligence system and, during the 1880s, added a substantial CI capability, housed in a unit of the General Staff called the Statistical Section. Commanded by Col. Jean Sandherr, the Statistical Section caught several spies in the army during the late 1880s, ran numerous double agents, and built extensive surveillance networks to watch the movements of foreign—and especially German—diplomats in Paris. One of the section’s most valuable recruits was Madame Marie Bastian, a cleaning woman who worked in the German Embassy and the apartments of German diplomats. The Germans routinely tore up sensitive documents and dropped the scraps into their wastebaskets, which Mme. Bastian dutifully emptied. Starting in 1889, she began delivering the contents of the embassy’s

---

*All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of an article's factual statements and interpretations.*

---

wastebaskets to officers of the Statistical Section. Much of what she handed over was ordinary trash, but the French frequently reassembled and translated important documents.<sup>a</sup>

One of Mme. Bastian's deliveries, in September 1894, contained a torn-up note in French that, when pieced together by the Statistical Section, proved to be a list of French military secrets someone had given to the German military attaché. An investigation started immediately, and suspicion soon fell on Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, a 35 year-old Jewish artillery officer from a wealthy family in the lost province of Alsace, then serving on the General Staff. The investigators quickly concluded that the handwriting on the note, known as the *bordereau*, belonged to Dreyfus, and he was arrested on 15 October and charged with treason.

Dreyfus was court-martialed and convicted in December, and sentenced to life in prison. On 5 January 1895 in the courtyard of the École Militaire, Dreyfus was publicly degraded—his badges of rank and decorations stripped, and his sword broken over the knee of a sergeant—and sent to Devil's Island, a hellish rock off the coast of French Guiana. Frenchmen of all political persuasions expressed their relief that the traitor had been caught and given an appropriately harsh sentence. Except for Dreyfus's brother, Mathieu, wife, Lucie, and lawyer, Edgar Demange, all France ignored the captain's claim of innocence and seemed content to forget about him.<sup>b</sup>

## ***A Time of Troubles***

France in the mid-1890s was a troubled country, buffeted by numerous political, social, and economic forces. The Third Republic had the support of most Frenchmen but, because many others were ambivalent about it or even denied its legitimacy, the republic was unsure of its strength. Monarchists still hoped to restore a king, and conservative Catholics and many clergy—themselves employees of the French state since 1802 and still in control of many aspects of French life—hated the republic's secularism. These groups were fiercely opposed by radicals and socialists, who not only defended republican ideals dating from 1789, but also wanted to eliminate the Church's influential and privileged position in French life. Spectacular financial scandals wracked the republic and often involved prominent political figures. Added to the mix was the fear of supporters of the republic that the army was not loyal to the government, a specter that had become all too real in the late 1880s when it seemed that a popular general, Georges Boulanger, was close to seizing power.<sup>c</sup>

France's problems extended to the economic and demographic spheres. The Industrial Revolution was late coming to France and, through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, French economic growth lagged behind those of other major European states. Its population remained more rural, its industries were less capital-intensive, and its productivity growth was lower than Britain's or Germany's—Europe's economic and technological powerhouse—and overall growth in the 1880s and 1890s was low enough that economic his-

---

<sup>a</sup> For the establishment of French intelligence after the Franco-Prussian War, see Allan Mitchell, "The Xenophobic Style: French Counterespionage and the Emergence of the Dreyfus Affair," *Journal of Modern History* 52, No. 3 (September 1980): 414–25, and Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 28–30. For the Statistical Section, its capabilities, and Madame Bastian's role, see Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair* (New York: George Braziller, 1986), 43–47, and Marcel Thomas, *L'Affaire Sans Dreyfus* (Paris: Fayard, 1961), chap. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Bredin, *The Affair*; 98.

<sup>c</sup> For the evolution of the Third Republic and the various political splits in France during the late 1800s, see Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rebérioux, *The Third Republic From its Origins to the Great War, 1871–1914* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Part I, originally published in French as *Les Débuts de la Troisième République* and *La République radicale?* (Paris, Editions du Seuil: 1973); and Norman Stone, *Europe Transformed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 271–303. For the position of the Catholic Church, see Othon Guerlac, "The Separation of Church and State in France," *Political Science Quarterly* 23 (June 1908): 259–96, and for Boulangism, see Bruce Fulton, "The Boulanger Affair Revisited: The Preservation of the Third Republic, 1889," *French Historical Studies* 17, No. 2 (Fall 1991): 310–29. A brief overview of the Third Republic before the Great War is Alan Farmer, "The Third French Republic, 1871–1914," *History Review* (September 2001): 41–46.

torians have talked of France's stagnation during the period. Comparisons with Germany, of course, were critical to the French. Even as they talked bravely of the inevitability of another war and gaining revenge for the humiliation of 1870, Frenchmen knew that their country was falling behind in the vital indexes of national power.<sup>a</sup>

By far the ugliest manifestation of France's nervousness, however, was the wave of anti-Semitism that had been spreading across the country since the late 1880s. It started in 1886, when a racist journalist named Édouard Drumont published *La France Juive*, a book that blamed all of France's troubles on Jews. Drumont and others, using the new media of mass newspapers and inexpensive books, found a nationwide audience for a message built on the ancient theme that Jews were treacherous outsiders. Conservative Catholics, blaming Jews for the republic's anticlericalism and accusing them of conspiring against Christianity, and socialists, who held Jews responsible for the evils of capitalism, also took up the cause. Although anti-Semitism had peaked and was in decline as a political movement by 1894, in large part because it lacked a coherent program and strong leadership, it still remained, as one historian of the phenomenon has noted, "a considerable latent force" in French society.<sup>b</sup>

Amidst the troubles of the Third Republic, the French army occupied a unique position. The army not only was the country's defense against Germany, but it also was expected to be the instrument—having been reformed and modernized after the war—with which France eventually would gain revenge for its defeat. But the army's role went beyond the military

sphere, and during this period was intimately connected with France's conception of itself. With the country so divided, the conscription-based army was the only institution that Frenchmen had in common and upon which they all looked with respect. The army, in turn, saw itself as rising above the country's political squabbles and petty problems to embody the true spirit of France. Still, however, because of the mystical conception of its role, as well as the widespread fear that anything that undermined the army's claim to infallibility would increase France's vulnerability to Germany, officers and many civilians believed that the army had to be exempt from any external criticism.<sup>c</sup>

### The Case Returns

Even before Alfred was deported to Devil's Island, Mathieu, Lucie, and Demange began working to void the conviction and secure a new trial ("révision"). As they approached senior political figures and journalists seeking support, the trio gradually learned that Dreyfus's conviction had been far more than a ghastly mistake and miscarriage of justice. Sandherr and other senior officers were truly convinced that Dreyfus was guilty—they believed the handwriting on the *bordereau* to be his and took it for granted that a Jew would be predisposed toward treason, but they also understood that the investigation had been badly flawed and that the case against him was weak. In the weeks before the trial, they had searched for additional evidence but, finding little, began forging documents to shore up the case. They secretly gave a file combining real and forged documents to the judges at Drey-

<sup>a</sup> Mayeur and Rebérioux, *Third Republic*, 46, 42; Rondo Cameron, "Economic Growth and Stagnation in France, 1815–1914," *Journal of Modern History* 30, No. 1 (March 1958): 1–13; N. F. R. Crafts, "Economic Growth in France and Britain, 1830–1910: A Review of the Evidence," *Journal of Economic History* 44, No. 1 (March 1984): 59; "War, Migration, and the Demographic Decline of France," *Population Index* 12, No. 2 (April 1946): 73–75.

<sup>b</sup> Robert Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 180–81, 251, 321–22; Paula Hyman, "The French Jewish Community From Emancipation to the Dreyfus Affair," in Norman Kleeblatt, ed., *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 28; Michael Marrus, "Popular Anti-Semitism," in Kleeblatt, *Dreyfus Affair*, 59. See also Robert Byrnes, "The French Publishing Industry and Its Crisis in the 1890's [sic]," *Journal of Modern History* 23, No. 3 (September 1951): 232–42, and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951), chap. 4.

<sup>c</sup> Allan Mitchell, "'A situation of inferiority': French Military Reorganization after the Defeat of 1870," *American Historical Review* 86, No. 1 (February 1981): 60; Mayeur and Rebérioux, *The Third Republic*, 188–90.

fus's court martial and, with the defense unaware of the file's existence and unable to refute it, convinced them to convict the captain. Mathieu found out about the file in February 1895, and its existence became public knowledge in September 1896, when *L'Éclair*—an anti-Dreyfus newspaper seeking to refute articles by Dreyfus's supporters (Dreyfusards)—cited it as irrefutable proof of his guilt.

In the meantime, the case against Dreyfus fell apart, causing the leadership of the army to take desperate measures to maintain the fiction of his guilt. In early March 1896, another of Mme. Bastian's deliveries contained a note that became known as the *petit bleu*, which indicated a French traitor still was providing military secrets to the Germans. Commandant Georges Picquart, who had succeeded Sandherr as commander of the Statistical Section, immediately started an investigation. Picquart had observed Dreyfus's trial for the Ministry of War and General Staff and believed him to be guilty, but Picquart also was a thorough and honest investigator. As he went to work on the *petit bleu* and reviewed the Dreyfus evidence, Picquart found the truth: the handwriting of the *bordereau* and the *petit bleu* was that of Major Ferdinand Esterházy, an officer chronically in debt and with a well-earned reputation as a scoundrel. With Picquart beginning to press his superiors to arrest Esterházy—and they, in turn, determined to preserve the army's image and conceal their own misdeeds—the deputy chief of the General Staff in October 1896 sent Picquart on a mission to eastern France and, from there, in December assigned him to a post in Tunisia. With Picquart out of the way, General Staff officers conspired directly with Esterházy to forge more documents to add to the case against Dreyfus and discredit Picquart.

The truth could not be suppressed indefinitely, however. Until the revelation of the secret file, Lucie, Mathieu, and Demange mostly had worked behind the scenes to gain support for *révision*, and the public paid little attention to Dreyfus. Now, Lucie petitioned the Chamber of Deputies for *révision*, bringing the case greater prominence in the newspapers and public arena.

Next, while on leave in Paris in June 1897, Picquart told his lawyer what he had learned. The lawyer, in turn, passed the information to some of the same individuals whom Mathieu Dreyfus had approached for help.

With these revelations, events began to move swiftly, and public support for *révision* grew. *L'Aurore*, a newspaper edited by Georges Clemenceau—a politician who initially believed Dreyfus guilty, but who now supported *révision*—started publication in October 1897 and became the major Dreyfusard platform. In mid-November, Mathieu—upon learning that Esterházy had written the *bordereau*—published an open letter to the minister of war accusing the major. Another investigation followed, and Esterházy, demanding a trial to clear his name, was court-martialed in January 1898. The Dreyfusards had great hopes for the trial—the evidence against Esterházy was strong, and a conviction promised to exonerate Dreyfus and force *révision*. But the General Staff, determined to cover its tracks, manipulated the trial behind the scenes, and the major was acquitted on 11 January. It was this sham trial and prearranged verdict that led the novelist Émile Zola, who already was a leading voice for the Dreyfusards, to write and publish in *L'Aurore* two days later his “Letter to M. Felix Faure, President of the Republic,” or, as Clemenceau concisely titled it, “J'Accuse.”

### ***The Affair***

The publication of “J'Accuse” started the 20-month period during which Dreyfus dominated French politics and society, and that is remembered as the heart of the affair. Zola, in prose that retains its power even today, accused the army of multiple violations of the law and named the officers responsible. His goal was to challenge the government to try him for libel and thus give the Dreyfusards another chance to present their case in court. Again, however, the army thwarted the Dreyfusards. Zola was tried on a narrow charge that effectively excluded evidence relating to Dreyfus. Despite damning testimony from Picquart, the Dreyfusards lost when Gen. Raoul de Boisdeffre, the chief of the General Staff, intimidated the court

with a reminder of the army's central role in French life. "If the nation does not have confidence in the leaders of its army, in those who bear the responsibility for the national defense," he told the court, "they are ready to relinquish that onerous task to others. You have but to speak." Zola was convicted on 23 February and in July fled to England to avoid imprisonment just a few days after Picquart was jailed on a trumped-up charge of divulging state secrets by telling his lawyer the previous year what he had learned.<sup>a</sup>

The affair now engulfed France, bringing the various forces in French life into a massive collision. To a modern American audience, the depth of division and feelings ignited by the affair are almost incomprehensible. In US history probably only the climax of the debate on slavery in 1860 was similar. The factions arranged themselves on each side, and each organized mass groups and demonstrations. On the Dreyfusard side, pressing the legal and political cases for *révision*, stood an alliance of republicans, secularists, modernizers, and socialists, as well as those conservatives appalled by the injustice of the case and by the army's extralegal maneuvering. Leading the fight against Dreyfus was the army, which claimed that no legal basis existed for *révision*, that reopening the case would weaken the army disastrously, and that the calls for *révision* were a Jewish plot to undermine the army and France. The army was joined by traditionalists, nationalists, the Catholic clergy, and anti-Semites, each of whom saw *révision* as a threat to their particular conception of what it meant to be French. Intellectuals on both sides wrote voluminously—the affair marked the emergence of the intellectuals as a force in

French politics—and the press carried their arguments to every corner of France. The affair focused, too, on the place of Jews in France. Anti-Dreyfusards tarred Jews as traitors or worse, and anti-Semitic newspapers, including Drumont's *Libre Parole* and much of the Catholic press, spread vile anti-Jewish propaganda and imagery. Not surprisingly, anti-Semitic rioting swept France and Algeria in early 1898, leading an American journalist to note that in "France today, it is perilous to be a Jew."<sup>b</sup>

As the affair continued in the streets and newspapers, the legal maneuvering went on. Finally, on 3 June 1899, France's highest court, the Supreme Court of Appeal, granted *révision* and ordered a new trial. On 9 June, Dreyfus boarded a French cruiser, and he arrived in France on 1 July. Zola, meanwhile, had returned to Paris on 4 June, and Picquart was released from prison on 9 June.

Politically, too, the Dreyfusards seemed to have gained the upper hand. On 22 June, a Dreyfusard, René Waldeck-Rousseau, formed a center-left coalition government. A stronger individual than most previous Third Republic prime ministers, Waldeck-Rousseau was determined to end the turmoil that threatened the republic. He moved quickly to restore discipline to the army by reassigning or retiring senior officers involved in the affair. He also ordered the arrests of prominent anti-Semites for fomenting unrest and suspended the salaries of Catholic clergy who were speaking out against the government.<sup>c</sup>

Dreyfus's second court martial began on 7 August 1899 in the town of Rennes. Counting the Esterházy and Zola trials, it was the fourth

<sup>a</sup> De Boisdeffre quoted in Bredin, *The Affair*, 268.

<sup>b</sup> Meyeur and Rebérioux, *The Third Republic*, 185; John T. Morse, Jr., "The Dreyfus and Zola Trials," *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1898): 589. Every account of the Dreyfus affair contains detailed descriptions of the impact on French life in 1898–99, but Bredin, *The Affair*, part III, may be the best. On specific aspects of this period, see Stephen Wilson, "The Antisemitic Riots of 1898 in France," *Historical Journal* 16, No. 4 (December 1973): 789–806; Paula Hyman, "The Dreyfus Affair: The Visual and the Historical," *Journal of Modern History* 61, No. 1 (March 1989): 88–109; Nancy Fitch, "Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Anti-Semitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France," *American Historical Review* 97, No. 1 (February 1992): 55–95; Norman Kleeblatt, "MERDE! The Caricatural Attack Against Emile Zola," *Art Journal* 52, No. 3 (Fall 1993): 54–58; Jeremy Jennings, "1898–1998: From Zola's 'J'accuse' to the Death of the Intellectual," *European Legacy* 5 (December 2000): 829–44; and Susan Suleiman, "The Literary Significance of the Dreyfus Affair," in Kleeblatt, *Dreyfus Affair*, 117–39.

<sup>c</sup> On Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry, see R. A. Winnacker, "The Délégation des Gauches: A Successful Attempt at Managing a Parliamentary Coalition," *Journal of Modern History* 9, No. 4 (December 1937): 449–70.

time the case had come to a court and, once again, army witnesses insisted that the evidence confirmed Dreyfus's guilt. On 9 September, the court-martial convicted Dreyfus of treason, but this time with attenuating circumstances, and sentenced him to 10 years. The absurdity of the verdict—Esterházy had publicly admitted in July that he had written the *bordereau* and, in any case, how could treason be excused?—appalled the world. The judges, wrote the *New York Times* in a comment typical of foreign reaction, “looked more guilty” than Dreyfus ever had.<sup>a</sup>

With France exhausted by the affair and the object of worldwide ridicule, a solution had to be found. After the Rennes verdict, Waldeck-Rousseau began working with other Dreyfusards to arrange a pardon, which President Emile Loubet granted on 19 September 1899. Two days later, the minister of war, Gen. Gaston de Galliffet, instructed the army that the “incident is over,” and, in December 1900, an amnesty law was passed, excusing all misdeeds related to the affair. The Dreyfus affair quickly died away, although Alfred continued to pursue *révision* of the Rennes verdict and complete exoneration. Finally, on 12 July 1906, the Supreme Court of Appeal overturned Rennes, declaring that “of the accusation against Dreyfus, there is nothing that remains standing.” On 20 July, in the same courtyard where he had been degraded almost 12 years before, Dreyfus was restored to the army with the rank of commandant and was made a knight of the Legion of Honor.<sup>b</sup>

### ***The Irresistible Topic***

The drama of the affair has made it irresistible to writers. All of the major participants wrote books and memoirs, the first appearing while the affair still was unfolding, and hundreds of works have appeared since. Amidst this wealth of written accounts, however, that of Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair* (published in

French as *L’Affaire* in 1983, with the US edition appearing in 1986), remains the best available in English. Bredin, a prominent French lawyer, tells the story carefully and with precise detail. His prose, however, is never ponderous, which makes the book’s 500-plus pages easy to read, especially as he gives his readers a good feel for the passions that swept France. Given his reliability as a historian and his literary skill, Bredin is unlikely to be surpassed for many years. Nonetheless, in the past two years three authors have tackled the Dreyfus affair. Each has looked at it from a different point of view, and each is worth reading for different reasons.

The first of the books, by lawyer-novelist Louis Begley, is *Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters*. At just over 200 pages of narrative, it is the shortest of the three, and Begley provides a concise and workmanlike narrative of the affair. Indeed, anyone who is new to Dreyfus and simply wants a quick overview of the case will be satisfied. But Begley has a greater purpose for his book. It is part of a Yale University Press series called “Why X Matters,” which tries to show the current relevance of people and ideas from the past. For Begley, the relevance comes from the war on terror, the abuses at Abu Ghraib, and questionable charges against detainees at Guantanamo. “Just as at the outset of the Dreyfus Affair the French found it easy to believe that Dreyfus must be a traitor because he was a Jew, many Americans had had no trouble believing that the detainees at Guantanamo—and those held elsewhere—were terrorists simply because they were Muslims,” he writes.<sup>(43)</sup> Begley’s heroes are the Dreyfusards and those he sees as their modern-day heirs in the United States—the whistle-blowers, lawyers, and judges who have stood up against “kangaroo trials” and “redeemed the honor of the nation.”<sup>(45)</sup>

Begley has a point, but it is not as strong as he believes. He certainly is correct that the Dreyfus affair is a reminder of the need for

---

<sup>a</sup> Rowland Strong, “‘Guilty’ Is the Dreyfus Verdict,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1899: 1. For foreign reactions to the Rennes verdict, see R. D. Mandell, “The Affair and the Fair: Some Observations on the Closing Stages of the Dreyfus Case,” *Journal of Modern History* 39, No. 3 (September 1967): 253–65.

<sup>b</sup> Bredin, *The Affair*; 434, 480.

great care in making serious charges and of humanity's almost infinite capacities for injustice and hysteria. But Americans do not need to look to Dreyfus for that lesson; we have cases like Leo Franks, the Scottsboro Boys, My Lai, and Watergate to show us our own records of injustice and the covering up of official misdeeds. More important, the United States in the first decade of the twenty-first century is not France in the 1890s. There are no serious challenges to the legitimacy of our republic, no institution makes the French army's claim of being exempt from criticism, and US administrations have not used slander or forged evidence to cover up crimes. Rather, the debates about Guantanamo and the treatment of prisoners have been typical of how modern American politics work through controversial issues for which there are few precedents—slowly and hesitantly, surrounded by noise, and with the fear of making an irrevocable mistake outweighing any desire to rush to a conclusion. This muddle may be unsatisfying, but it also means that the United States is not ripping itself apart or indulging in the kind of ethnic hatred that marked the French debate about Dreyfus.

If Begley's book serves best as an introduction, Frederick Brown's *For the Soul of France* places the affair in its broad context. This is the best written of the three books, as Brown, who previously penned a biography of Zola, combines deft writing and biographical sketches with brief histories of the major political and cultural conflicts that marked the first three decades of the Third Republic. Each of the cases he presents—including the building of Sacré-Coeur, the scandals over Union Générale and Panama, the rise and fall of Boulanger, the building of the Eiffel Tower, as well as the Dreyfus affair—pitted the forces of French traditionalism and Catholicism against modernizers and secularists, in battles far more fierce than any of the culture wars we have experienced in the United States during the past two decades. In each episode, moreover, the arguments eventually centered on the Jews and their place in French society. The collapse of the Union Générale, which was run by a Catholic financier, was widely attributed to Jewish conspiracies that simultaneously con-

trolled the republican government. Similarly, Brown's description of reactions to the Eiffel Tower shows how these controversies encapsulated the passions and irrationality running through French society. "For aesthetes, Eiffel's tower was the grotesque child of the industrial age, desecrating a museological city. For Catholics, it was the sport of revolutionary Nimrods expounding their secularism in Notre Dame's parish with phallic arrogance. And for nationalist zealots, who joined the chorus, the wrought-iron tower, incommensurate with everything else in Paris, was a tyrannical mutant, a foreigner lording it over the French past and future, a cosmopolite aspiring to universality, a potential instrument of treason. As such, it could only be the invention of 'Israel.'" (151)

In this telling, the Dreyfus affair becomes just one more front in France's internal conflicts. Indeed, Brown's account of the affair takes only 50 of the book's 250 pages of text, and it seems notable more for its intensity than for the issues in play. Every factor at work during the affair had been on display since 1870, and many of the individuals who would play major roles in the controversy had come to prominence in the episodes Brown describes; French cultural and political history from 1870 until Dreyfus's arrest seems to be a long rehearsal for the climactic period from his degradation to the Rennes verdict. The risk of this approach is that the affair might start to lose its visibility and no longer seem as important an event as we are used to viewing it. Nonetheless, *For the Soul of France* is the account for those who like their history presented with linear themes and who want to know the long background to specific events.

The last of the three books, by Oxford University historian Ruth Harris, is *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century*. This is a comprehensive history of the affair and goes well beyond the standard narrative approach, such as that used by Bredin. Instead, Harris dives deeply into the people, ideas, and cultural phenomena of the affair. The result is a book of great complexity, filled with many surprises. The history of the affair has been written from the Dreyfusard side,

which has given us a portrait of brave and good Dreyfusards fighting the reactionaries and bigots. By digging deep, however, Harris shows that the situation was much more complicated. Early on, for example, she shows that the army's relationship with Dreyfus was uneasy long before the discovery of the *bordereau*. Dreyfus owed his advance to reforms—enacted after the Franco-Prussian War—that created a modern staff system and opened opportunities for Jewish officers who, until then, would have been on the margins of the army. But traditionalists disliked the reforms, many of which were copied from the Germans. By 1894, the traditionalists were regaining power in the army, and the officer corps was again closing to outsiders; Harris speculates that Dreyfus's career probably would not have lasted much longer, even if he had never come under suspicion of espionage.

Harris finds other crosscurrents to explore. One intriguing aspect was the role of the many Alsations who were involved in the affair and who, like the Jews, were in a difficult position. "Alsations insisted on their Frenchness, but they were often seen as the embodiment of Germanness. They thus had to position themselves against the prejudices and storms that such polarized categories created," she writes. (74) Dreyfus, in an unfortunate reflection of his Alsatian origin, spoke French with a German accent, which made him doubly suspect. This also leads to her portrait of Picquart, whom the Dreyfusards held up as a great hero of the affair, but who also typifies the contradictions within many of the players. Picquart was an Alsatian, which made it that much easier for his superiors to hound him and portray him as a pawn in external conspiracies; he was a shrewd bureaucrat but fudged some aspects of his investigation to protect his career; he was an intellectual and a polymath in an army that distrusted too much cleverness; and he shared the anti-Semitism of the officer corps.

Harris undertakes many other interesting explorations, each of which shows that nothing about the affair can be taken at face value. For example, Harris shows how Dreyfus became a useful object for both sides as they pursued their broader political goals, and she covers the

Dreyfusards' propaganda and myth-building as well as the anti-Dreyfusards' use of Catholic martyrology to build support for their cause. Elsewhere, Harris wonders why many on the right insisted on Dreyfus's guilt despite the evidence and their own unease with anti-Semitic excesses. The answer, she says, lies in their memories of political battles from years past. "When they saw Joseph Reinach and Georges Clemenceau, who had been tainted by the Panama Scandal, running the Dreyfusard campaign, they were appalled that such politicians should now claim the moral high ground," she explains. (217) Harris also has a fascinating chapter on *salonnières* and mistresses of powerful men—what is French history without them?—who played critical roles in the affair. On the Dreyfusard side, too, Harris reveals that backbiting and self-serving behavior were the norm.

This is an insightful and sophisticated book. Harris's micro-level view of the affair gives a vivid demonstration of how and why people acted as they did, and few come out as purely good or bad. She also tells us much about what was happening around France and how the affair played out in the provinces. This is not an easy book, however. The prose is clear and generally lively, but the level of detail means that in some places it is hard going. Nor is this the book for anyone new to the affair. A reader who plunges into *Dreyfus* without either a familiarity with French history and politics or without first reading Bredin or Brown is unlikely to get very far. Those with the background, however, will find it an exceptionally rewarding work.

### ***Dreyfus and Counterintelligence Today***

As interesting as Brown's and Harris's approaches to Dreyfus are, some may wonder what relevance these books, and the affair, have for us today. There are several answers to this question. The most obvious, from Begley, is that the affair is a timeless warning about injustice. The memory of Dreyfus does indeed remain a touchstone for those who want to call attention to wrongful judgments. Unfortunately, this also leaves the affair vulnerable to

manipulation—defenders of the Rosenbergs and Alger Hiss, to note two major American cases, for decades claimed that these spies were Dreyfus-style victims. Another answer is that the case actually has never gone away, especially in French political life. In 1983, Jack Lang, the minister of culture in the Socialist government, commissioned the creation of a statue of Dreyfus. When it was ready in 1986, the proposal to place the statue at the École Militaire enraged the army and started fresh discussions of the traditionalist-modernist divide in French political culture. After two years of indecision, the statue was finally set up in the Tuileries. Six years after that, on the centenary of Dreyfus's original conviction, the head of the French army's historical section was sacked after he wrote an article minimizing the army's misconduct and suggesting Dreyfus may not have been innocent. The episode, noted Bredin, showed the "persistence of the old anti-Dreyfusard mentality, conserved and transmitted for over a century." Others have noted that, as a result of the affair, French governments still distrust their intelligence services and consequently make poor use of them.<sup>a</sup>

For US intelligence officers, the affair has an entirely different relevance. It is a basic truth in the CI world that intelligence services are products of their societies and reflect the histories, politics, morals, and cultures of the populations that supply their officers. Studying these topics is an important part of any effort to understand the behavior of an intelligence service, which is the essence of CI work. In the Dreyfus affair, this means understanding why the Statistical Section and the army, at every turn, doubled and redoubled their bets against Dreyfus. Their behavior is incomprehensible without an understanding of the anxieties and conflicts that wracked France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, too, no one will understand the behaviors of the US, British, French, Israeli, or Russian intelligence services—and,

for that matter, the different ways they respond to espionage cases—without knowing the contexts in which they are situated. A CI officer needs to be a historian, sociologist, political scientist, and cultural analyst, all at once.

I began this essay by suggesting that an aspiring CI officer begin learning his craft by studying the Dreyfus affair. The contributions of Begley, Brown, and especially Harris remind us that Dreyfus is the starting point for modern CI history and show that the case is a model for approaching the study of CI and espionage. The large and varied number of factors involved makes a final point, as well. Anyone planning to do serious CI work has a lot of studying to do.

### ***For Further Reading***

The Dreyfus affair has generated an enormous literature—the Library of Congress catalog lists more than 150 books, in both English and French—beginning with works written shortly after Dreyfus's conviction and continuing to the present.

Three books are indispensable to understanding the affair. The first is Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair* (New York: George Braziller, 1986), originally published in French as *L'Affaire* (Paris: Julliard, 1983). Bredin, a French legal scholar, covers both the case and the political and social aspects of the affair in depth, and with insights that make his work the best single volume on the affair. After Bredin, the best account is Marcel Thomas, *L'Affaire Sans Dreyfus* (Paris: Fayard, 1961). Thomas, a French archivist, is more narrowly focused than Bredin and based his work on a deep familiarity with the original documents from the case; unfortunately, his book has never been translated. The third book is an English collection—translated by Eleanor Levieux and edited by Alain Pagès—of Zola's

<sup>a</sup> Stanley Meisler, "Statue Needs a Home: The Dreyfus Affair—It Never Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1986: 1; Stanley Meisler, "Paris Finally Finds a Place for Dreyfus Statue," *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1988: 11; Scott Kraft, "A Century-Old Scandal Haunts France's Army," *Los Angeles Times*, February 18, 1994: 4; Alan Riding, "100 Years Later, Dreyfus Affair Still Festers," *New York Times*, February 9, 1994: A10; Eric Denécé and Gérald Arboit, "Intelligence Studies in France," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 23, Issue 4 (Fall 2010): 727.

articles on the affair, *The Dreyfus Affair: "J'accuse" and Other Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), which also contains a useful chronology and capsule biographies of the major figures. Although not central to understanding the case, Alfred Dreyfus, *Five Years of My Life: 1894–1899* (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1901) provides extracts from Dreyfus's letters and prison diary and gives a good sense of his character.

Other works cover specific aspects of the affair. Bredin provides a thorough bibliography, broken down by subject area, although most of his references are to French works. Frederick Busi, "A Bibliographic Overview of the Dreyfus Affair," *Jewish Social Studies* 40, No.1 (Winter 1978): 25–40, is a useful guide to the French and English literature as it stood in the late 1970s. Two review articles by Eric Cahm, "No End in Sight for Dreyfus Research: The Beginning of a Twelve-Year Centenary," *Modern and Contemporary France* 3, Issue 2 (May 1995): 202–5, and "Centenary Reflections on Rennes and the Dreyfus Affair," *Modern and Contemporary France* 7, Issue 4 (November 1999): 509–12, update Busi's listings. Below are individual works particularly useful for understanding various aspects of the affair.

The standard account of the early years of the Third Republic is Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rebérioux, *The Third Republic From Its Origins to the Great War, 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For an overview of European political, economic, and social change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that places French developments in their international context, see Norman Stone, *Europe*

*Transformed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

On anti-Semitism and the affair, see Robert Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1950); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951), chap. 4; and Nancy Fitch, "Mass Culture, Mass Parliamentary Politics, and Modern Anti-Semitism: The Dreyfus Affair in Rural France," *American Historical Review* 97, No. 1 (February 1992): 55–95.

For the French military and the affair, the major work is Douglas Porch, *The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chaps. 1–4. Allan Mitchell's two articles, "The Xenophobic Style: French Counterespionage and the Emergence of the Dreyfus Affair," *Journal of Modern History* 52, No. 3 (September 1980): 414–25, and "'A situation of inferiority': French Military Reorganization after the Defeat of 1870," *American Historical Review* 86, No. 1 (February 1981): 49–62, also are valuable aids to understanding the army's behavior. Robert Kaplan, "Making Sense of the Rennes Verdict: The Military Dimension of the Dreyfus Affair," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, No. 4 (October 1999) 499–515, makes interesting points about the value the French military secrets involved in the affair but spins an unlikely explanation for the army's behavior.

For a collection of images generated by the affair, as well as essays on its artistic, legal, literary, and intellectual aspects, see Norman Kleeblatt, *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

