

The Dreyfus Affair - Part IV

Lead: Imprisoned for treason he did not commit, French Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus became the focus of a great national crusade.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: Dreyfus was clearly innocent. His 1894 conviction was fixed by military authorities anxious to protect the Army from the embarrassing discovery of a German spy in the War Ministry, but they got the wrong man. While Dreyfus served his sentence on Devil's Island, the

infamous French prison colony off the coast of South America, his family and a growing number of supporters worked to prove his innocence. Among the most prominent of the Dreyfusards were George Clémenceau, the future wartime Premier, and the novelist and left wing agitator, Emile Zola.

The Army's case against Dreyfus began to fall apart when Lt. Colonel Georges Picquart found evidence that the actual culprit was still at work. Major C.F. Esterhazy was unaware of the cause of Dreyfus' downfall since the proceedings had been kept secret. Esterhazy's handwriting matched that of the original spy letter which had been discovered by French counter-

espionage.

When Picquart tried to bring charges against Esterhazy, he was dismissed and the scandal became public. Esterhazy was later court-martialed, but the Army in desperation, forged documents and suppressed others and he was acquitted. However, the controversy would not die.

On January 13, 1898 Emile Zola printed an open letter in a major newspaper under the headline, "J'Accuse," in which he accused the Army of duplicity and incompetence. The suicide and confession of one of the Army conspirators and the flight of Esterhazy to Belgium later that year

opened the way to a new trial for Dreyfus. He was once again found guilty but was later pardoned by the President of the Republic. Subsequent trials cleared him and reversed all previous convictions.

The Dreyfus Affair made more stark the many divisions in French society and destroyed any hope of national unity in the years running up to the First World War. France was still divided in 1914 and ill-prepared for the onslaught of the Germans, but Alfred Dreyfus and his supporters had been vindicated. Clémenceau became wartime Premier. Picquart became Minister of War. Dreyfus served with distinction as a line officer. After the war, this man whose cause had so

**roused the passions of a great nation
retired into obscurity and died in 1935.**

**At the University of Richmond, this
is Dan Roberts**

Resources

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