

One Traitor or Another: The Dreyfus-Judas Connection during the Dreyfus Affair

Sara Reynolds

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Florida

The Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906) raised questions about nationalism, citizenship, corruption and stability during the Third Republic. Antisemitic ideology pervaded the popular press during the Affair. Jews were labeled as foreigners, identified with treason, accused of partaking in a conspiracy and believed to be dominating and infiltrating French society. This article examines the French antisemitic newspaper *La Libre Parole* as well as other illustrated journals and discusses how antisemites framed Jews as treasonous outsiders in order to solidify their own place as supportive, loyal citizens in French society. By connecting Dreyfus with Judas, antisemites used a historically established image associated with treason to illustrate the threat that Jews, and those who supported the Dreyfusard cause, supposedly represented in modern French society. This strategy allowed antisemites to justify their own position in a changing society while simultaneously undermining the secular, meritocratic system of the Third Republic.

In September 1894, a concierge assigned to the German embassy in Paris removed a note, known as the *bordereau*, torn into six pieces from the wastebasket in the office of the German military attaché Maximilien von Schwartzkoppen. The note, delivered to the Statistical Section, a bureau of the General Staff in charge of espionage and counter-espionage, revealed that the General Staff had a traitor in their midst. After hasty investigation, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer and intern of the French Army's General Staff, was arrested, interrogated, and taken to court on charges of treason.¹ Dreyfus was tried, declared guilty by a unanimous vote on December 22, 1894, and sentenced to exile on Devil's Island, off the coast of South America.² Not long after his conviction, Dreyfus's wife, Lucie, and brother, Mathieu, fully convinced of Dreyfus's innocence, began a campaign for revision. This campaign began an ordeal known as the Dreyfus Affair, which enveloped France for twelve years (1894–1906). Extensively covered by the press, the Dreyfus Affair divided the French nation into two vehement groups: the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards. The Dreyfusards believed in Dreyfus's innocence and the miscarriage of justice surrounding his trial and saw the Church and the army as institutions opposed to a modern, secular state. The anti-Dreyfusards believed in Dreyfus's guilt and supported the Church and the army, which, in their eyes, represented stability through resistance to social conflict and change and protection against internal and external enemies.³ It is important to note that not all anti-Dreyfusards were antisemitic and that some Dreyfusards expressed antisemitic views.

The Affair represented “the struggle between the individual and the state; between civilian government and military authority; between the politics of parliamentary institutions and the politics of the mob; between the

belief—religious or secular—in a common humanity and the modern calculus of racism.”⁴ It provided an environment in which French political ideologies developed and were expressed and was one of the first moments in history when the ideas of nation, race and religion played a significant role in the motivations of each opposing side and the outcome of the Affair itself. The press acted as a particularly important medium through which these ideas manifested themselves. Issues of national identity and loyalty became so important because many of the members involved in the Affair came from Alsace, a province bordering France and Germany. Because Dreyfus and so many other major participants originated in Alsace, antisemites characterized them as even more likely to commit treason. The antisemitic press, specifically Edouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole*, adopted a nationalist perspective to legitimize itself in the eyes of the French public but, in reality, used patriotism as a means of avoiding concerns of social hierarchy, class conflict, and a changing society.

Jews were natural targets for allegations of espionage and treason. The press published articles and illustrations that accused Dreyfus, the Jewish community, and Dreyfusards of treason, espionage, false patriotism and disloyalty, and connected them with Germany, a long-time enemy of France. Visual and printed polemic allowed antisemites to emphasize their own elite status and to denounce as meaningless the merited status of Jews or Dreyfusards. Publications in the press also demonstrated attempts by antisemites to explain the failures of the decadent society in which they thought they lived, allowing themselves to remain unaccountable for corruption, military failure, mediocrity, and weakness.

The identification of Jews with traitors was by no means new but was an idea that extended into the past as far as the

Medieval era. By the end of the Middle Ages, Jews in France were identified with Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Catholic Church sanctioned works that emphasized the Jewish responsibility for the murder of Christ.⁵ The word “Judas” was often used to describe a traitor and “Judas the traitor” became a traditional stereotypical figure in popular literature, providing antisemites with a ready-made myth to exploit.⁶ During the late nineteenth century, antisemites believed Jews were going to betray France, just as Judas had betrayed Christ, a theme often reinforced by Drumont.⁷ Dreyfus was depicted and connected with Judas throughout the Affair. As Judas posed an internal threat to the Christian community by betraying Jesus, so Dreyfus posed an internal threat to the French nation. Another connection made between Judas and Dreyfus was that antisemites believed both had betrayed for money.⁸ On November 3, 1894, only six days after the arrest of Dreyfus had been publicly announced, Edouard Drumont wrote an article condemning Jews for treason, saying, “Judas sold the God of mercy and love ... Alfred Dreyfus sold to Germany mobilization plans.”⁹ Again on November 7, in an interview with *La Patrie*, Drumont stated, “Dreyfus’s treason has not surprised me ... Dreyfus did that which Judas did.”¹⁰ Drumont reminded the reader that not only did Dreyfus give privileged information to France’s enemy but also that he did it as a form of self-profit, implicating his selfish interests instead of national interests. By connecting Dreyfus to Judas, antisemites gave Dreyfus’s actions apocalyptic implications. The connection also implied the amount of depravity and sinfulness of Dreyfus’s character, a metaphor that would have rung true in a largely Catholic nation in which one Assumptionist priest stated that “[t]o be Catholic and to be French are one and the same thing.”¹¹ Additionally, by comparing Dreyfus to Judas, antisemites succeeded in alienating Dreyfus from his peers and from the French people as a whole. At Dreyfus’s public military degradation on January 5, 1895, the observing crowd shouted, “Wretch! Judas! Long live France, dirty Jew!” and a group of officers shouted, “Judas! Traitor!” Maurice Barrès described the degradation as the “parade of Judas.”¹² Bernard Lazare, one of the first Dreyfusards, explained the Judas-Dreyfus phenomenon by saying, “They [antisemites] needed their own Jewish traitor to replace the classic Judas.”¹³ The link between Judas and Dreyfus also exemplified the ambiguity of modern antisemitism. A coherent ideology for modern antisemitism, which discriminated against Jews on secular and ethnic levels, was still developing during the Dreyfus Affair, and in order to create this ideology it relied on many traditionally antisemitic images and notions, discriminating against Jews on religious levels.

The illustrated press contributed visually to the polemic surrounding the Dreyfus Affair. Caricatures portraying Jews in negatively stereotypical ways existed throughout

the nineteenth century, commonly appearing in illustrated newspapers and published images during the 1880s and 1890s. It was easy for antisemites and anti-Dreyfusards to apply traditional images to the figures and events of the Dreyfus Affair.¹⁴ The illustrated press often portrayed Dreyfus as a traitor using stereotypical and pejorative images. *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, the illustrated component of *La Libre Parole*, printed the image entitled, “About Judas Dreyfus,” (Figure 1) in which Edouard Drumont is shown lifting up a man with a hooked nose, a traditionally stigmatized Jewish image, and wearing a German military cap with the label “traitor” written across his forehead. This man is clearly supposed to be Dreyfus, and the caption reads, “Frenchmen, for eight years I have repeated this to you each day!”¹⁵ The image and its message reminded the viewer that Dreyfus’s loyalties were in question; that, as a Jew, he was a foreigner and as an Alsatian Jew he was linked to Germany in more than militaristic ways; that he was depraved and sinful by nature; and, most importantly, that his guilt justified and legitimized the antisemitic arguments Drumont had been



Figure 1. J. Chanteclair, “A Propos de Judas Dreyfus,” *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, November 10, 1894.

publishing for a decade. Antisemites needed Dreyfus to justify their accusations; without the Jew, the antisemite would be unable to exist. As Sartre stated, "If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him."¹⁶ The treacherous Jew of Drumont's works was an invented Jew until the Dreyfus Affair, when antisemites were able to project their fears and irrational beliefs onto a specific person. No longer was the nefarious Jew an abstract notion, but, in Dreyfus, real and concrete.

On November 14, 1896, the illustrated journal published an image entitled "Judas defended by his brothers," (Figure 2), which shows Dreyfus in the background looking at several stereotypically Jewish figures holding copies of Bernard Lazare's *Une Erreur Judiciaire*, a pamphlet published in November 1896 that condemned the injustice of Dreyfus's 1894 trial.¹⁷ The title of the image emphasized



Figure 2. "Judas défendu par ses frères," *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, November 14, 1896.

the connection between Judas and Dreyfus and between treason and Jews. It also condemned Jewish support of the Dreyfusard cause, a condemnation that would also appear in the antisemitic theories on the Jewish international conspiracy. This image expanded on the validation of antisemitic notions. Antisemites already established that Dreyfus represented a real, not an imagined, threat to society. By illustrating the connection between Dreyfus,

other Jews, and the Dreyfusard cause, antisemites broadened the threat to not only one man, Dreyfus, but to the Jewish community and the Dreyfusard cause as a whole. By scapegoating the Jewish community and the Dreyfusards, antisemites refuted any accusations denouncing the antisemitic community. *La Libre Parole* printed an article that stated, "When analyzing the almost immutable character of the Jew, we claimed a sort of fatality preventing him from ever assimilating to us, one said of us [the antisemites] that we were the fanatics, the bad citizens searching to provoke a race war."¹⁸ In this polarized name calling, as well as in the images presented in the illustrated press, antisemites claimed their own status as good, loyal citizens by labeling Dreyfus and the Dreyfusard cause as disloyal, foreign, and threatening. On April 13, 1895, *La Libre Parole Illustrée* published an image (Figure 3) in which Dreyfus is portrayed, once again with the stereotypical hooked nose, carrying a sign that reads, "Traison Nobleman."¹⁹ This image is particularly interesting because without the Jew antisemites would be criticizing the nobles, the elite, the very part of society to which they wanted to belong. Without the Jewish noble, the antisemite would simply be denouncing the nobility and therefore putting his own patriotism in question. This image also calls attention to the antisemitic belief that Jews, through their domination of French

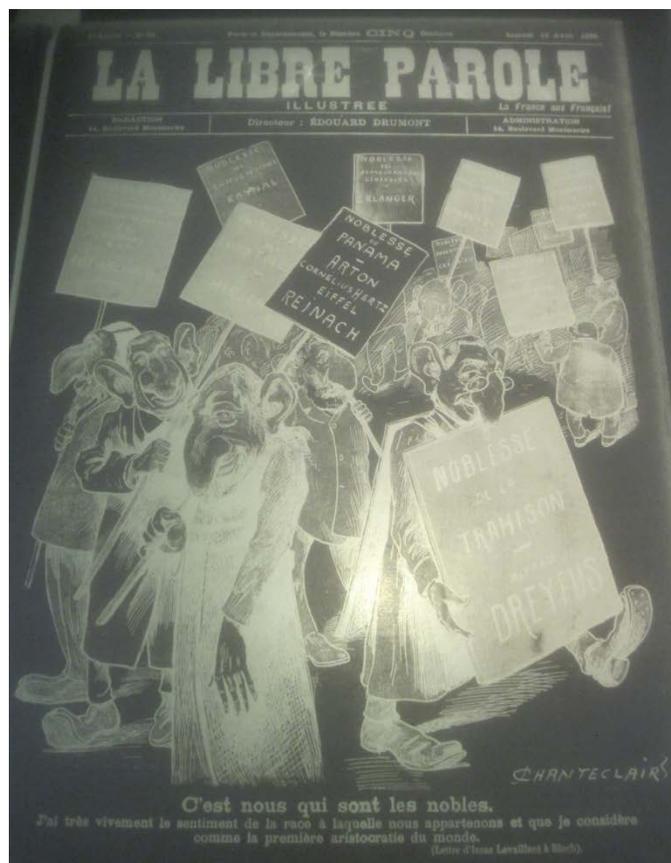


Figure 3. J. Chanteclair, "C'est nous qui sont les nobles," *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, April 13, 1895.

society, had replaced the pure, hierarchical, *ancien régime* society. Antisemites believed that because many Jews held high positions in government, universities, and other professions it was easier for them to commit treason and cause weakness and instability in the French nation. Notions of Jewish dominance in society played upon the visibility of a few Jewish figures in certain professions, largely exaggerating the role of the Jewish community as a whole in higher echelons of society.²⁰ By labeling the Jewish "nobleman" as "treasonous," antisemites also undermined the social status and worth of successful Jews and Dreyfusards, affirming their own status as part of the elite, therefore establishing, in the minds of the antisemite, the hierarchical society that they desired.

On November 17, 1894, *La Libre Parole Illustrée* published an image (Figure 4) in which Dreyfus, with the word "traitor" across his forehead, attempted to free himself of his crime by bathing in gold.²¹ This image connected Dreyfus with Judas by reminding the Christian readers that both Dreyfus and Judas betrayed for money and also reminded the reader of the Jewish connection to and control of the financial industry. The image illustrated



Figure 4. J. Chanteclair, "Savonnage infructueux," *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, November 17, 1894.

r the antisemitic idea that Jews believed they could achieve anything, including innocence, using their financial resources. Antisemites believed that truth and innocence could not and did not come from wealth but from the hearts and minds of the true Frenchman, loyal to his country because he was ancestrally rooted to it. The illustrated journal *Psst...!* published an image (Figure 5) on February 5, 1898 called "The House of Alfred Dreyfus, Judas and Co." in which a man dressed in German clothes hands a large check to a Jewish clerk.²² This image again asserted Dreyfus's ties to Judas, Germany, and the financial



Figure 5. Caran d'Ache, "Page d'histoire: Maison Alfred Dreyfus, Judas, and Co.," *Psst...!* February 5, 1898.

industry. Antisemites insisted upon the decadence of Dreyfus and persisted in alienating him from the French public. The irony of this argument was that Dreyfus rejected German citizenship and opted for French citizenship after the Franco-Prussian War and excelled in military training, influenced in part by his desire for revenge against Germany's annexation of his homeland.

He also had a large independent fortune and would not have needed the petty cash earned from espionage.²³

The nationalist antisemitic press used the notion of Jews and treason to influence public opinion and justify their own position in a changing society. By labeling Jews as traitors, antisemites undermined the secular, meritocratic system of the Third Republic and established the foundation for the definition of a “good citizen” that would best suit the role of the antisemite in society. Connecting the Jews to Germany not only emphasized the alien nature

of Jews but also aided antisemites in characterizing Germany as an inferior power, reinforcing the myth that France retained her *ancien régime* role as one of the most influential continental powers. Connecting Dreyfus to Judas emphasized that Dreyfus had an innate treasonous quality and a depraved, sinful nature. Antisemites exploited the connection to illustrate that Dreyfus lacked loyalty to France, emphasizing the notion that Jews were a threat to French society.

NOTES

¹ Louis Begley, *Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 9, 15.

² Michael Burns, *France and the Dreyfus Affair: A Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1999) 21, 43.

³ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe Before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56, 60, 280.

⁶ Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience: Antisemitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1982), 391, 424.

⁷ Brustein, *Roots of Hate*, 56, 60, 280.

⁸ Ivan Strenski, *Contesting Sacrifice: Religion, Nationalism and Social Thought in France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 103.

⁹ Edouard Drumont, “L’Espionnage Juif,” *La Libre Parole*, November 3, 1894.

¹⁰ “Une interview d’Edouard Drumont,” *La Libre Parole*, November 7, 1894.

¹¹ Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871–1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 135.

¹² Gaston Méry, “La Dégradation de Dreyfus,” *La Libre Parole*, January 6, 1895; Burns, *A Documentary History*, 51, 54.

¹³ Brustein, *Roots of Hate*, 77.

¹⁴ Paula Hyman, “The Dreyfus Affair: The Visual and the Historical,” *The Journal of Modern History* 61, no. 1 (Mar. 1989), 91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1880968>.

¹⁵ J. Chanteclair, “A propos de Judas Dreyfus,” *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, November 10, 1894; Martin P. Johnson, *The Dreyfus Affair: Honor and Politics in the Belle Époque* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), 54–55.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ant-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1948), 13.

¹⁷ “Judas défendu par ses frères,” *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, November 14, 1896.

¹⁸ Gaston Méry, “Haute Trahison,” *La Libre Parole*, November 4, 1894.

¹⁹ J. Chanteclair, “C’est nous qui sont les nobles,” *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, April 13, 1895.

²⁰ Brustein, *Roots of Hate*, 189.

²¹ J. Chanteclair, “Savonnage infructueux,” *La Libre Parole Illustrée*, November 17, 1894; Strenski, *Contesting Sacrifice*, 104.

²² Caran d’Ache, “Page d’histoire: Maison Alfred Dreyfus, Judas, and Co.,” *Psst...!* February 5, 1898.

²³ Burns, *A Documentary History*, 25–26.