

Timothy Ryan
AP Euro
Period C
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Historical Essay Analysis

Title: Captain Dreyfus: The Story of a Mass Hysteria

Author: Nicholas Halasz

Author's thesis: The Dreyfus Affair is of significant importance in European history as the first time the media and public opinion were used to tyrannize its own people, in the form of French Antisemitism at the turn of the century.

Author's evidence:

- a) Dreyfus was made a scapegoat because he was the only Jewish General Staff officer
- b) He was tried and convicted only because of the Antisemitic outcry in the media
- c) Efforts to vindicate Dreyfus were silenced so as not to discredit the Army
- d) Emile Zola was one of the few not taken in by the sensationalism and mass hysteria
- e) As the Army was losing technical superiority in the "war of revenge", it used Antisemitism as an 'enemy from within' to distract the people and maintain popularity
- f) The Affair eventually led to French reform

Author's conclusion of the topic's significance:

The Dreyfus Affair occurred at a critical juncture in French history, where politics were unstable and only the Army maintained popularity via Antisemitism. It was the first sign of the potential for tyranny in democracy and popular culture, an important theme in the 20th century.

What questions you have about the reading:

1. Had the Dreyfus Affair not occurred, would monarchists have gained power in France?
2. What link was there between the Dreyfus Affair and German Antisemitism?
3. What lessons can we learn from it?

To what extent does your knowledge of the period support or conflict the author's thesis?

My knowledge of the period supports the events that occurred in the Dreyfus Affair, and that, as the concept of a mass media and popular culture began to solidify at the end of the 19th century, the potential was there for them to be manipulated to cause mass deception and hysteria, later a prominent theme in 20th century politics and wars.

Explain the gist of the article, the nature of the evidence, and the significance of the topic:

The Dreyfus Affair was a situation that occurred during the turn of the century in France, where Jewish General Staff officer Alfred Dreyfus was accused and convicted of treason on baseless evidence. This occurred as a result of the Antisemitism which ran rampant through French popular culture, thoroughly encouraged by the mass media which had arisen. This was primarily orchestrated by the Army as a means to maintain popularity while the government was undergoing heavy criticism and the Army itself it was losing its own self-proclaimed "war of revenge" on its enemies. The Affair was the first case in the modern era when public opinion and the media were manipulated to spread mass hysteria, and as such it had many implications for democracy in the 20th century.