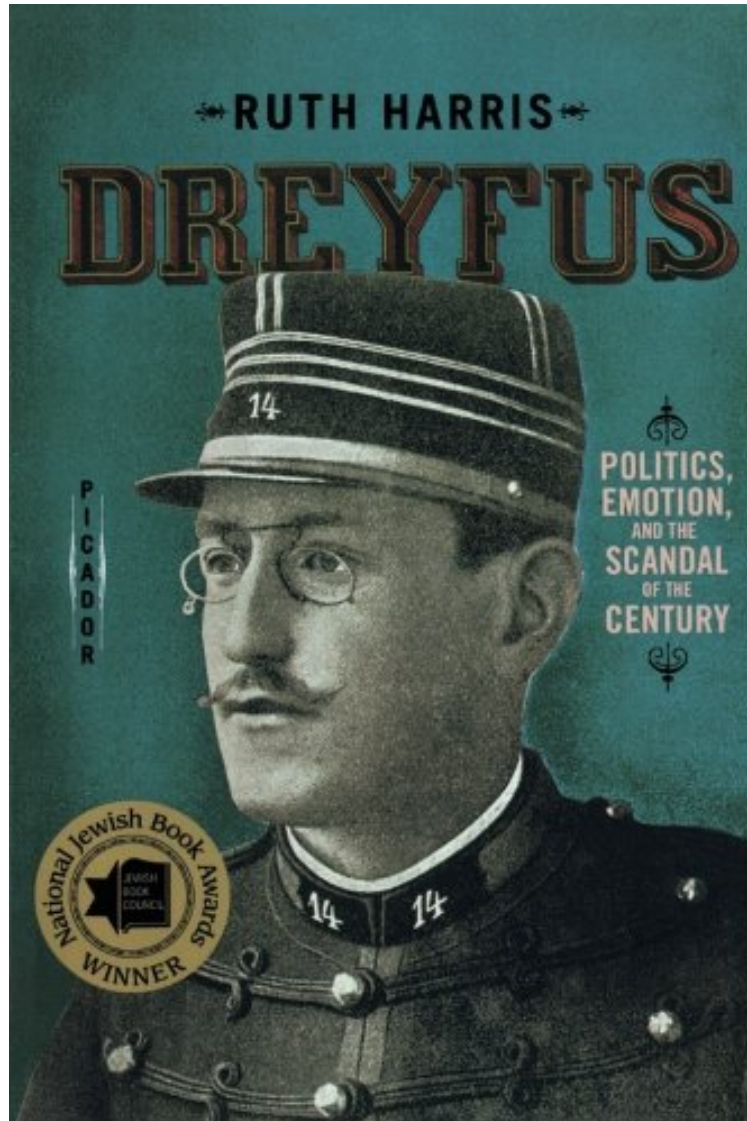


Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century

Ruth Harris

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#1321608 in Books Ruth Harris 2011-06-21 2011-06-21 Original language: English PDF # 1 228.60 x 1.28 x 6.00l, 1.58 #File Name: 0312572980572 pages Dreyfus Politics Emotion and the Scandal of the Century | File size: 45.Mb

Ruth Harris : Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century:

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Familiar story, new approach By Jack Rice I'm amazed that there are so few reviews for this fascinating book. I think it's because everybody thinks he knows the story, so who needs another book. But do we really know the story? What's puzzled me over the years is how polarizing "The Affair" has

been for the French. An innocent officer was sent to Devil's Island by high-ranking scoundrels who knew he was innocent but who ordered up a guilty verdict, concocting and suppressing evidence, suborning perjury and silencing witnesses, in not one but three sham trials. The motives of the perpetrators were based on careerism, class, anti-Semitism and rank stupidity and incompetence. It is they who belonged on Devil's Island. This is what the evidence shows. So, why the continuing controversy? What author Ruth Harris shows is that for the "Dreyfusards" and "anti-Dreyfusards," Dreyfus the man had become subordinated to Dreyfus "The Affair," where evidence was beside the point. The man was about guilt or innocence, but The Affair was about identity politics. The two sides just didn't like each other and used The Affair to justify their animosity. Harris's book, then, is an examination not only of what happened to Dreyfus but what drove The Affair. The great contribution Harris makes is the relevance of her approach to today's politics. Republicans and Democrats have much in common, but their differences -- particularly personality and class -- make them behave as polar opposites, who don't just disagree with each other but despise each other. One can even hear echos of Dreyfus in the rhetoric surrounding the Dominique Strauss-Kahn affair. Harris makes the Dreyfus affair a case study of what Freud called, "the narcissism of marginal difference," and for me it's been a revelation.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. but pretty accurate view of the Trial and its immediate aftermath
By Barbara S. Burstin this is a fascinating book that I read as a sequel to the Officer and the Spy which was a fictionalized, but pretty accurate view of the Trial and its immediate aftermath. Ruth Harris' book gives the historical context as the trial unfolds and even more importantly in the years subsequent to the trial. It's detailed, but a good read.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Authoritative account
By Tony Tavill This is a scholarly yet an entirely readable account of one of the great scandals of the late 19th century from a real authority. Ruth Harris recreates a complicated scenario and leaves the reader in a very informed state of mind to reach his (her) own conclusions.

National Jewish Book Awards Winner
In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was wrongfully convicted of being a spy for Germany and was imprisoned on Devil's Island. Oxford historian Ruth Harris presents the scandal of the century in all its human complexity. Drawing on private letters and thousands of previously unconsidered sources, Harris offers a definitive account of the tragic drama that divided French society and stunned the world. Sweeping and engaging, Harris's retelling of the Dreyfus Affair extricates it from the myths of both the left and the right, offering a new understanding of one of the most significant episodes in modern history.

From Publishers Weekly
Harris (Lourdes) revisits that notorious miscarriage of justice, the Dreyfus affair. Alfred Dreyfus, a dedicated Jewish French army captain was convicted of spying for Germany based on flimsy and fabricated evidence, and sentenced in 1895 to life on remote Devil's Island. Utilizing private correspondence and archives, Harris trains her gaze on several key players: Lucie Dreyfus, who changed from modest wife and devoted mother into an unremitting fighter for her husband's release; Dreyfus's chief polemicist, Emile Zola, charged with libel for his confrontational writings during the affair, was equally reckless (in Harris's word), creating a secret, second family with his maid; and Col. Georges Picquart, who while in charge of the Dreyfus investigation, discovered the real culprit. Despite his dislike of Jews, Picquart defied his superiors to free Dreyfus; for his efforts, he was himself imprisoned on trumped-up charges. While detailing how many on the political and religious right embraced anti-Semitism as a nationalist unifying passion, Harris also demonstrates that the Dreyfusards were flawed men and women who often overcame prejudices and fears to battle the conspirators against Dreyfus. This well-researched, and nuanced book is an engrossing account, the second this year after Frederick Brown's *For the Soul of France*. 68 bw illus. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist
It is just over a century since the final exoneration of Alfred Dreyfus, after *L'affaire Dreyfus* convulsed France for a dozen years. Yet historical analysis and re-examination continues. Of course, no serious historians question Dreyfus' innocence, but the significance of various elements of the affair remains fertile ground for historical debate. Oxford fellow Harris' recounting of the case from inception to conclusion is comprehensive and offers some original and provocative insights. The conventional view that the affair pitted assorted reactionaries and anti-Semites against a coalition of liberals and progressives is rejected as simplistic. Rather, both the defenders and attackers of Dreyfus were motivated by a complex series of emotions and political stances, including nationalism, religion, republicanism, and nostalgia for a France that never existed. Much like the Rosenberg case in the U.S., the guilt or innocence of Dreyfus became almost irrelevant to the causes he symbolized. This is a well-written and well-researched analysis of a great miscarriage of justice.

--Jay Freeman
It is the goal of the Oxford historian Ruth Harris to extricate the Dreyfus Affair from the myths it has generated, on both the left and the right, and to trace its tortuous evolution from 1894 to 1906 in all of its human complexity. Combining an even-tempered tone with generosity of imagination, she has achieved that goal. Harris's excellent *Dreyfus* deserves a wide audience for its patient, fair-minded exploration of human ideals, delusions, prejudices, hatreds and follies. Leo Damrosch, *The New York Times Book Review*
Scrupulous and well-written Ruth Harris's rather beautiful and complex study is a conscious attempt to add, or better say restore, the layers of ambiguity that are lost if we accept the almost classical model of confrontation between darkness and enlightenment.

It's not that she is, in any usual sense, a revisionist. Indeed, her restatement of the essential and unarguable point--the complete innocence of Captain Alfred Dreyfus--could scarcely be bettered. In some ways, then, Harris's narrative actually enhances the traditional picture of good triumphing over injustice, with the French secular left wearing the white hat. But she expertly identifies the exceptions. Harris is to be thanked for the care and measure of her sifting and weighing, and for the deep historical perspective that she brings to the undertaking. Christopher Hitchens, *The Weekly Standard* An extraordinary study of the affair as a tragic drama that swept up a man, his family and friends, and more widely French society and the French state The strength of Ruth Harris's book is to present the Dreyfus Affair as a human and social drama. Whereas many accounts concentrate on the conspiratorial and public dimensions of the debate, Harris--who has read thousands of the private letters of those involved--moves easily between the public and the private, the intellectual and the emotional She demonstrates that the Dreyfusards were not all apostles of the Enlightenment; neither were all anti-Dreyfusards benighted traditionalists. Robert Gildea, *The New York Times* Harris has uncovered a wealth of new documents, and she tells her story to satisfy those with an appetite for rich historical detail. Simple dichotomies make for dangerous politics and for dubious histories. This balanced and thoughtful account of Dreyfus is a compelling reminder of the complexity and pathos of the past. Michael S. Roth, *The San Francisco Chronicle* Ruth Harris's meticulous, assured, and engrossing account of the Dreyfus Affair calls to mind none of the many books on the subject Harris has produced a history sensitive to historical limits. She unravels decisions made in the swirl of experience, fraught with contradiction, accident, and incoherence and governed by emotion as much as reason, by prejudice as much as principle. Harris's eye for the vivid detail gracefully complements her analytical rigor and is one reason her book is a pleasure to read. John Palattella, *The Nation* Excellent A thorough work of scholarship with a firm sense of its own place in the historiography A carefully crafted intellectual history of fin-de-siècle France that explores at length the biographies and feuds of dozens of Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards. All of Harris's investigations are thoughtful and beautifully written. Michael O'Donnell, *Washington Monthly* Longer works about Dreyfus have been written, but I can't imagine one better... The cast rivals *War and Peace*, and Harris tells who they were, what shaped their views and their roles in the affair. These interesting accounts enormously deepen our understanding. Neal Gendler, *The Jewish Chronicle* Illuminating Harris paints well the complex lives created by Dreyfus's condemnation, and offers a richly textured account of the *dramatis personae*--not only in the Dreyfusard camp, but anti-Dreyfusards as well. One of Harris' main accomplishments in her rich and nuanced book is restoring a face to Alfred Dreyfus himself. He has never seemed the adequate hero for such an epic struggle. In detailing Dreyfus's family life--especially his close relation with his intrepid and forceful wife, Lucie--and his unwavering commitment to the army and its values, his firm if rigid sense of the honorable course of action, she makes him more understandable than most previous historians. Peter Brooks, *Truthdig* A most comprehensive and nuanced account of the participants on both sides of the imbroglio, rich with information Harris is a first-rate narrative historian... What marks Harris's contribution is her formidable research skills, her exceptionally wide general and historical reading, and her always interesting eye for the revealing anecdote or pen portrait. Carmen Callil, *The Guardian (UK)* In many respects, the Dreyfus Affair remains the founding event of modern politics. Ruth Harris's insightful and fascinating study brings the debate, which riveted France and the world for over ten years, back to life. With an ethnographer's attention for the salient detail, time and again Harris reveals aspects of the Affair that her predecessors, among both ideological camps, have inexplicably overlooked. She achieves all of this with a mellifluous prose style and an accomplished novelist's sense of narrative framing. Her book on the Affair is destined to become the standard work for years to come. Richard Wolin, author of *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* Ruth Harris's new book on the Dreyfus Affair tells the story colorfully and with admirable completeness, while revealing new dimensions that both complicate and enrich our understanding of what drew people to involve themselves with it. Her sensitivity to the personal motives at work on both sides and to the sometimes surprising features of religious and secular culture of the time makes what has long been recognized as a moment full of passion and significant conflict still more engrossing. Jerrold Seigel, author of *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Europe since the Seventeenth Century* Ruth Harris is one of the most thoughtful and original historians writing in English today. In her hands, the Dreyfus Affair escapes the century-old interpretation of its protagonists to reveal the humanity of Alfred Dreyfus, who disappointed his supporters, and the courage of his wife, Lucie, whom they largely ignored. By the end, we realize that because pro- and anti-Dreyfusards inhabited the same cultural universe, they weren't as far apart as many historians have believed. Dreyfus's proponents were right, of course, but for reasons more emotionally and politically complex than we have known until now. Edward Berenson, author of *The Trial of Madame Caillaux*