The Dreyfus Affair

Can your own country be against you, even despite your patriotism, devotion and the sense of belonging? The case of Alfred Dreyfus shows that it can. Indeed, his Jewish identity caused his wrongful accusation and stopped the French system from a just treatment.

This kind of behaviour was not new since anti-Semitism preceded the case in thousands of years. In fact, being Jewish could close many doors for a person, starting from land ownership in Medieval Europe, and following to the high-level accusations, such as treason. For example, the picture on the left portrays the brutality, with which the Jews were treated. The man who stands on the top is a Frenchman, who tries to attack a Jewish man without any weapons. The Jewish man is portrayed without any clothes, which shows him as a primitive person. He also has a big nose, which was stereotypical of the Jews back then. Moreover, the Jews were known to have money and the person also has many coins. This picture shows the Jew as a greedy person, which was another negative stereotype.
Would Dreyfus be treated differently if he was not a Jew? He certainly would. His case shows the very obvious discrimination, which is rooted in a deep anti-Semitic history in France, and also in Europe. There was no evidence that he committed the crime, but he was used as an excuse for the real problems in the French army. For the French, it was easier to blame the Jew, since this would be not contradicting their bad standards. The system was not interested in Dreyfus as a French citizen, and it put his Jewish identity in front of his national. Dreyfus had no protection from the state and also from the army, for which he served.

Yet not everybody agreed with this treatment. The French society was sharply divided over the Dreyfus case. The picture on the left shows this division. It portrays a family dinner and the fight over the case of Dreyfus. The media captured the division of the society into two camps: anti-Semitic French and their opponents. Thus, Dreyfus had support, but it was not from the state. He was freed thanks to the support of the people. Some famous people advocated for his freedom. Emile Zola wrote a letter to the President of the Republic of France, Félix Faure “I accuse.”

When Dreyfus was released, there were more trials, and his case was not solved immediately. Despite his patriotism to France, he was not fully seen as “French.” This double-standard treatment exemplifies the alarming tendency in the society, who was supposed to be based on the ideas of “liberty, equality, fraternity.”