I. Purpose and overview of the lecture

A. To examine one of the most famous trials of history—as colorful and emotional but still more famous and certainly more long-lasting and influential than the O. J. Simpson trial
   1. It divided France as no trial has ever divided a country
      a) Everyone French knows about it to this day, and many will still argue about it

B. To place that trial, and the ensuing “affair”, in its historical context, to make understandable why it caused such an uproar

C. To make some broader observations about the role of anti-Semitism in history, looking toward nazism and the Holocaust

D. [Students should be reading my book, *Anti-Semitism before the Holocaust*]

II. Long-range background in Europe

A. Much of the previous lecture is relevant to the background to this trial
   1. The general weakening of liberalism in many arenas
   2. The Great Depression of 1873-1894, shocking liberals and undermining faith in the free-market economy
   3. The so-called “Second Industrial Revolution,” witnessing much larger industrial concentrations, a move away from the “classical” economic system of many small industrial units
      a) A parallel tendency for industrial unions to grow up, larger, more “collectivist”
      b) In both of these there is a tendency to move away from the former sense that the individual could accomplish great things on his own
         (1) Now it was necessary to be part of a larger group
   4. The rise of “irrationalist” trends and theories (Freud, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, etc.)
   5. The Rise of Germany and the relative decline of France
a) The special tension between those two countries by the end of the century

b) The state system as a whole seemed to be engendering national tensions, especially after 1890, with alliance between France and Russia, etc.

6. The rise of mass politics, and the rise of the masses in many other regards

a) Not only getting the vote, but new “yellow” journalism, new kinds of political parties (using demagogic devices to rally the people)

III. Long-range background in France

A. The situation of Jews in France in the nineteenth century:
   1. They were widely believed to be unusually favored:
   2. They got civil equality in 1791, rose in French society rapidly in 19th century
      a) Jews in other countries tended to envy them
   3. French Jews prospered especially in the Third Republic, and most of them warmly supported it, which aligned them on the left, mostly the moderate left
   4. Their numbers were quite small compared to the Jewish populations of central and eastern Europe
      a) French Jews constituted approximately .02% of the total population of France, around 40,000
         (1) German Jews were approximately 1% (500,000), Austrian 5%, Russian 10% -- approximately 100 times more numerous than in France
      b) And French Jews were strongly over-represented in various areas: the professions, commerce, academia, government; generally in the urban areas, Paris in particular, under-represented in agriculture, manual labor

B. Anti-Semitism in France
   1. A fair number of anti-Semitic writers or theorists appeared in France in the 19th century
   2. But until the 1880s there had been relatively little overt
expressions of it—few anti-Jewish riots, physical attacks on Jews

3. One of the most common charges against the Jews by anti-Semitic writers was that they, or their leaders, were organized into a clandestine “ Syndicate”
   a) This was allegedly a body of men who manipulated the economy and state from behind the scenes
   b) The Rothschilds were commonly charged with being key players in the Syndicate

C. The Third Republic in the 1880s
   1. A number of trends in the 1880s tended to turn against the Jews
   2. Anti-republican sentiment became especially raucous (even while general support for the Republic was slowly increasing)
      a) The French Right charged that the Republic (la gueuse – the slut) was in the hands of corrupt politicians, themselves often in the pay of Jews
      b) The Right believed that left-wing republicans wanted to destroy the Church, “ dechristianize” France, tear it away from its sacred traditions—a belief that in fact had some validity
   3. These beliefs were much intensified by a series of laws, called the Ferry Laws (after the French politician who authored them), passed from 1879 to 1886 that sought to move education out of the hands of the Church
   4. The failure of the Union générale 1882
      a) The Union générale was a Catholic bank explicitly formed to offer alternatives to Jewish and Protestant banks
      b) Its failure was blamed by many on Jewish machinations, especially the Rothschilds
      c) Many small Catholic investors lost their savings, spreading resentment and suspicion
   5. The scandals around the unsuccessful French effort to build a Panama canal
      a) Parliamentary corruption was undeniably important in these scandals, and in fact a number of Jews were involved in bribery of deputies
6. The anti-Semitic press makes a great deal of the Panama scandals
   a) Most notable: Eduard Drumont’s paper, *La libre parole*
   b) He wrote a run-away best-seller, *La France juive* (1886) [Jewish France, charging that France was now almost completely in the hands of the Jews]

IV. Immediate background and outline of first stages of The Affair

A. The early 1890s were years of greatly increased tensions between France and Germany
   1. France’s treaty with Russia made Germany feel “encircled”
      a) Many in France feared that Germany might attack again, before the military aspects of the alliance could be worked out
   2. There was a flurry of spy scandals, and a near mania in the newspapers—wild charges and speculations
      a) Many papers, Drumont’s as well as many others, charged Jews with being prominent among the spies
      b) Even Jewish military officers were charged with spying for Germany

B. A Spy in the General Staff?
   1. The *bordereau*
      a) It was ostensibly a list of secrets for sale, “found” in the German Embassy by a military intelligence agent (cleaning woman)
      b) The bordereau threw French military intelligence into a near panic—who could be selling these secrets to the Germans?

C. The traitor: Alfred Dreyfus?
   1. By a complicated process, mostly by comparing handwriting, the culprit was “found”—Alfred Dreyfus
      a) He was a French captain, a candidate for the General Staff
   2. What became finally of central importance: He was also Jewish
3. And the key question: Was he unfairly charged because of the anti-Semitism of his officers?

D. Dreyfus was arrested, told the evidence against him was overwhelming, and offered the honorable way out: suicide
   1. Since he was in fact innocent—as only later would become clear to large numbers of people—he was stunned, and refused the offer of a pistol, to commit suicide
   2. How overwhelming was the evidence in fact?
       a) Not very: similar handwriting, and a few other rather doubtful documents (one that referred to that “dirty dog D. . .”), and circumstantial
          (1) (Dreyfus was supposedly in the right places to get that kind of information)
       b) Did his accusers in fact choose him because he was a Jew? (that is the question, one that in fact is not easy to answer)

E. The plot then thickens:
   1. News of Dreyfus’s arrest was leaked to the press, in particular to Drumont’s Libre Parole
      a) Drumont had already launched a campaign against “treason in the army”
      b) He now announced in his paper that Dreyfus had “admitted everything” but because Jewish influence and money he would finally be let free
   2. Drumont’s “revelations” made it all the more difficult for figures in the army to back down, admit they had made a mistake
      a) If they did, Drumont would be sure to denounce them as being in the pay of the Jews

V. The trial (December, 1894)
A. It was held in camera before a military tribunal
B. Most observers at the time recognized that the evidence against Dreyfus was thin, and to some degree contradictory
   1. The bordereau was the main piece of material evidence
      a) Handwriting experts differed about whether it was written by Dreyfus,
b) It was in fact not clear that Dreyfus could have been in a position to know about the “secrets” in the list.

2. There were other problems:
   a) Dreyfus was a rich man, unlikely to be selling secrets for the paltry sums involved
   b) He had been since a child devoted to the army and to France, a conservative super-patriot

3. What no outsider knew at the time, however, was that further evidence was given to the judges that the defense was not even allowed to see
   a) This of course violates courtroom rules, even for military trials, that someone charged with a crime must be able to see the evidence against him
   b) The excuse given was that the material was a military secret, and that if it were known, France’s national security would be threatened—perhaps even a war would ensue

4. Perhaps even more decisive was the testimony given by Commandant Henry
   a) He swore that a “secret informant” had told him that Dreyfus was a spy (but he could not reveal that informant, again for reasons of national security)
   b) Observers were all impressed with Henry's sincerity and apparent integrity (and he had a good record as an officer)

C. Dreyfus was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil’s Island
   1. He also was sentenced to undergo a solemn military degradation

D. Many applauded the verdict, although some complained that if he had not been a Jew, he would have gotten the death penalty
   1. Such opinions were characteristic of right and left, Jew and non-Jew, pretty much across the board, including people who would later come to Dreyfus’s defense

VI. The smoldering Affair

A. There was yet no Dreyfus Affair, since nearly everyone believed that a guilty man had been caught and properly punished in a fair trial
B. Many congratulated the Army for being tough and vigilant, as well as incorruptible (unlike other branches of the government).

C. For some time, Dreyfus was simply forgotten, although his brother, Matthieu, now devoted his life to free Alfred.
   1. But for some time, he had very little luck
      a) Indeed, he was shunned, both by Jews and by non-Jews, many of whom feared that any contact with him would make them appear to be in the pay of the Jews, or associated with the family of a traitor to France.

D. But disturbing indications of Dreyfus's possible innocence began to emerge.
   1. First of all, military secrets continued to flow into the German Embassy.
   2. But more important, the new head of Military Intelligence came across strong evidence that the spy was in fact another man, a certain Esterhazy.
   3. This new head, Georges Picquart, was an intriguing man.
      a) He had known Dreyfus, had in fact been his instructor in a military class.
      b) And he did not like Dreyfus—indeed, was himself something of an anti-Semite.
      c) But he also could not accept that an innocent man, even if a Jew, had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

E. Picquart communicated his doubts to his superior officers, who told him to drop the subject.
   1. When he would not, they saw to it that he was transferred—to a dangerous war zone in Algeria.

F. Henry was given Picquart's position, and he then began to doctor and fabricate various documents to bolster the evidence of Dreyfus's guilt.

VII. The Affair explodes

A. By early 1898 various leaks and rumors about the Dreyfus case resulted in increasingly furious debate about it.

B. Now, much more than before, anti-Semitism came to play an undeniable and overt role.

C. And much of the debate came to range far beyond the issue of
Dreyfus’s guilt or innocence

1. Political factions lined up on one side or another
2. Indeed, much of society, especially in Paris was bitterly divided—brother from brother, father from son, former friends, etc.
3. And the Affair became for many something like a religious crusade:
   a) Recognizing his innocence became a matter of respect for truth, honesty, and decency
   b) For others the issue was rather the survival of France, the destructive power of an innocent verdict—even if Dreyfus was innocent—on the army in this period of great vulnerability
   c) For them the fate of one man could not be held above the fate of the nation

D. The evidence about Esterhazy’s role finally was released, and he was put before a military court

1. The court found him innocent, after a very short deliberation, and he was greeted by many as a national hero, an innocent victim of Jewish machinations
2. At the same time, Picquart, who was a witness at the trial, was arrested, thrown into prison

E. Zola’s J'accuse!

1. Zola, in the pages of a prominent newspaper, wrote an open letter to the president of the Republic, accusing the leaders of the military of conspiring to convict an innocent man
2. Enormous outrage ensued, including anti-Jewish riots
3. Zola finally fled to England to evade arrest

F. The collapse of the case against Dreyfus

1. Henry’s forgeries were finally uncovered
2. He was arrested, confessed, and then committed suicide (although under suspicious circumstances)

G. Esterhazy fled to England, and confessed that he was the author of the bordereau

H. Dreyfus’s second trial (summer 1899)

1. He was brought back from Devil’s Island and given
another trial

2. But he was again found guilty, though with “extenuating circumstances”—which were not explained

I. But in the meantime a new government had come into power, and it offered him a pardon, which he accepted

1. The pardon outraged many, since it made it seem that Dreyfus was being pardoned for a crime he had committed—yet he was innocent

2. The terms of the pardon also let off the various officers involved—they and Dreyfus were to be equally “pardoned”

VIII. The victory of the Dreyfusards

A. The new left-center coalition that formed in part in response to the Dreyfus Affair made a number of moves to weaken the reactionary Right in France

1. The Church and state are separated (ending the Concordat signed by Napoleon I)

2. Many right-wing army officers are dismissed

B. The ambiguities of victory

1. Many accounts of the Affair have portrayed these events as a clear victory of good over evil, of toleration over bigotry, etc.

2. But unfortunately, the story is not that simple

   a) Many Dreyfusards proved to be scarcely less prone to intolerance than their opponents

3. Some Dreyfusards were profoundly disillusioned by what victory finally meant

   a) Péguy in his book, *Notre Jeunesse*, spoke of the inevitable move from *mystique* to *politique*, from inspired idealism and selflessness to political machinations and careerism

IX. Antisemitism: A new political tool?

A. Another large ambiguity was the role of anti-Semitism in the trial

B. It turns out that many of Dreyfus’s defenders were themselves hardly free of antisemitism
1. Zola had written crude and ugly things about Jews in his novels, for example

C. It finally was not at all clear that anti-Semitism was the main reason that Dreyfus was arrested and convicted
   1. Although after that, once the campaign for his release had begun, hatred of Jews was expressed in appalling ways by large numbers of French people

D. A large question lingered afterward: How much could Jew-hatred be used as a political device?
   1. Did it have the potential to unite opposites, right and left, rich and poor, worker and boss?
   2. If it could do that in France, the country of Enlightenment and toleration, what might it do elsewhere?
   3. That was a question that would arise again, and very powerfully—indeed was already becoming an issue in many countries of Europe by the 1880s and 1890s