Twelve years. Twelve years required to dispose of treason charges that should never have been brought in the first place. Two years of the most intense factional struggle, in which the future of the nation seemed at stake. Fifty years before France could escape the shadow cast by the experience. And, after a time that now approaches a full century, the legacy of those twelve years still seems a heavy burden. Every year new books and articles try to comprehend the Affair's great and little mysteries.

All this could not have begun with the crime that was the occasion for it. We must look farther back to discover what developments conditioned the responses in battle of those who cared so much for how an alleged criminal was judged. Like contemporary observers in other countries, who watched the conflict in amazement, most of us can readily begin to grasp what motivated the Dreyfusards. Their values were very much in what we have understood to be the main current of modern Western culture. There may be riddles about them too, but they do not baffle us as may the stubbornness and fury of the anti-Dreyfusards. Because of this, inquiry into antecedents should concentrate mainly upon the origins of anti-Dreyfusard attitudes. It should also look for chronic conflict in the country that might have found expression in the struggle over Captain Dreyfus and help to explain its intensity.

At the end of the nineteenth century France was a severely divided country. Although long bound by a centralized and bureaucratic state system, it was nevertheless much fragmented by regional, social, and ideological differences which made its supposed unity an illusion. Each of these categories will be examined in turn, with emphasis upon the last, especially the disaffection of many from the government of the Third French Republic.

People in many parts of the country felt more reason for attachment to their own locales than they did to the claims of French nationalism. Before the mid-nineteenth century France was not an integral nation but a composite bound together by a succession of political regimes, none of which had won the general allegiance of the peoples governed. There was no general sense of community or commonality: Too few ties existed between different parts of the country. Abstract political visions of nationality did capture some people but could not readily transcend the actual divisions felt by the rest. By the nineteenth century's end a national identity had become better established but conflicted still with regional particularism, and with indifference or antagonism toward the metropolitan center, Paris, which often seemed alien.¹

Locales very often had little contact with one another. With primitive inland transport and mostly localized economies, isolation was inevitable for most of the population. During the second half of the nineteenth century this changed, with rapid, comparatively cheap transport and wire communications making the breakdown of isolation possible, though not automatic. People in every corner of France were increasingly affected by what their fellow citizens elsewhere did.

France was divided also by lack of a common language. At mid-century French was a foreign tongue to half the citizens, and few were literate in it. Perhaps a fifth or more knew no French at
all. Dialect differences were substantial, and patois speakers were not likely to be receptive to outlanders, especially when the latter so often brought sharp commercial practice, more government control, or other apparent harm. The unity of culture, language, and literature dear to nationalists was an ideal realized only for the well-educated, and even among them it was often countered by particularism in their native provinces.

Internal barriers were reduced in the 1850s and 1860s by economic development, especially railway construction. Much more effort at reduction of differences and nation building was undertaken with the establishment in 1875 of France’s Third Republic.

After Napoleon III’s imperial regime collapsed in 1870, Republicans eventually prevailed but for many years had to contend against a powerful royalist opposition. Insecure in their shaky claim to citizen allegiance, and endowed by their republican forebears with a nationalist ideology, the new regime’s leaders were determined to make the people truly republican and French in their loyalties. This was to be accomplished above all by political education, which would indoctrinate the populace with the requisite political values. Education would also enlighten it, banishing superstition—especially that of Catholicism—raising moral levels, and preparing people to be useful, docile participants in modern progress.

Previously schooling had with a few exceptions been rudimentary and crude, and much of it had been conducted by priests and nuns. The Third Republic made major improvements in all aspects of education and did much to secularize it through limiting the role played by the Church’s schools and teaching orders. Moreover, every effort was made to staff schools with committed republicans who would give political indoctrination a central place in their teaching. They made French language and history instruction their best instruments for the purpose of indoctrination, which was proudly proclaimed by the Republic’s leading educators.

In time the desired effects were at least partly achieved, with ever more people able to speak and read French and with a sense of French national identity seeming to be ever better established. Republicanism’s successes were less readily apparent, but election results indicated that indoctrination might be increasingly effective in this respect as well.

Nevertheless, such education could not end regionalism and distrust of the regime. Antagonisms dividing France remained, more transformed than transcended. In particular, the secularization of education was the most obvious and probably the most substantial action taken by the Third Republic to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church. This aroused intense hostility among the clergy and many of the Catholic faithful. Controversial measures implementing secularization policy were adopted over the course of decades, thus keeping this education issue one of the most important reasons for continuing severe antagonism toward the Republic.

Development of the French economy created strains that contributed fundamentally to conflict. While strain seems to have been limited in extent earlier, by the late nineteenth century industrialization and urbanization were finally making their impact felt throughout France. Geographic isolation had once insulated people in many places from change and all the dangers it might bring. Now this protective isolation was scarcely possible, as railroad branch lines and increasingly vigorous modern economic activity touched almost everywhere. Traditional crafts and agriculture became subject to the new forces of commerce and finance. Workers often were displaced from their jobs by the effects of industrial and commercial development and competition, and industrial centers drew labor from all over the country.

Modernity brought both real and illusory advantages to many of the French, and they often welcomed and rejoiced over the changes. Yet modernity brought harm as well, notably the widespread effects of recurrent economic slumps in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Change also brought uncertainty and strangeness. Old, familiar forms often seemed more desirable, and stability promised security, while novelty could seem to threaten harm. Isolation’s end introduced outside influences, which severely disrupted local folkways and led to the discarding of many customs. Even where the immediate practical harm of change was not great, people could be concerned about what might happen next.

Thus, dread of potential injuries and resentment of actual ones were powerful forces shaping a wide range of attitudes in late-nineteenth-century France. Inevitably many of these attitudes found political expression, especially through hostility against the Republic—which represented itself as the principal...
agency of change. It was indeed a major innovative force, both through such direct intervention as educational indoctrination and through its regular, energetic actions to protect and advance private business interests, especially those in the more aggressive segments of capitalist enterprise.

Urban workers had originally been receptive to the promise of universal benefits to be derived from republican politics and liberal economic development. The poor of Paris and other cities had risen for this cause in the Revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848. Then came bloody, brutal repression of additional worker rebellion later in 1848, and much more terrible repression of workers who revolted in 1871. In the cities the social distance between the middle and working classes had grown so great that they had little contact and often viewed each other with mutual enmity. The bourgeoisie by turns ignored the workers and feared them, anticipated revolt and prepared repression. Workers endured, but as their anger welled up they became more threatening still. And rural folk feared both the urban workers and the middle classes, who intruded into rural life by means of modernizing economic activity, increasing government intervention, and periodic political upheaval.

Workers disillusioned with the promise of republicanism and liberalism turned gradually to trade unionism and proletarian political movements, most of them leftist in orientation, though some were associated with the right. Strikes became more common, both with and without union organization, as did violent clashes between workers and either employers or, more often, the State’s guardians of civil harmony and free enterprise. Indeed, strikers and bosses often did not negotiate with each other, and government officials intervened to maintain order by either resolving labor disputes or repressing them.

The Republic’s promise to proletarians remained effective enough to cause most of their political action to follow legal paths, especially those of electoral and parliamentary politics. Anarchists and other especially militant rebels also had influence, however, for they better expressed the anger and impatience that suffering people often felt. Still, development of all proletarian movements proceeded at a modest pace; workers belonging to unions or voting for socialist candidates remained minorities in the general population, and popular attitudes were not radically transformed by other movement activity, either. In retrospect proletarian revolution in France appears to have been most unlikely.

Nevertheless, the bourgeoisie took the threat of militant labor and the radical left to be very grave. Employers were loath to accede to any worker requests, and socialist intentions against private property were anathema. It was common to regard workers as little more than brutes whose human qualities existed mainly as potential for future evolution. Bourgeois observers supposed that a subhuman existence of poverty, ignorance, alcoholism, hereditary defects, and disease had left them degenerates who threatened the continued progress and even the survival of society. Memories and fantasies of riot and rebellion made more fortunate people fear any gathering of workers as a potentially dangerous mob.

Actual disturbances and attacks were magnified out of all proportion to their real frequency or import. One killing in a strike became the germ of widely believed fantasies about frequent murderous strike violence. Extremist rhetoric by radicals was taken as a serious indication of devilish plots afoot. Rhetorical excesses by anarchists were accompanied by rash of sensational bombings and other violence, which were concentrated in the two years just before the Dreyfus Affair began. While most of the assassins were deranged individuals with little connection to any actual movement, these attacks produced hysteria and anticipation of an Armageddon of class war. The fears did not vanish when the assaults subsided. Especially alarming was the rise in the late 1890s of revolutionary syndicalism, a seemingly potent movement directing organized labor toward anarchist social revolution.

The State security apparatus worked assiduously to counter these supposed threats, with the greatest effort directed against anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. Much energy was expended upon collecting intelligence about supposedly subversive activity. Repressive laws were enacted, and criminal prosecution of radicals was employed as a political weapon. Preparation was made to contain or suppress trouble ranging from disorderly strikes to riots to full-fledged revolt. From 1898 on there were elaborate contingency plans to mobilize both police and Army in any strength needed for this purpose.

Anxiety over the threat of proletarian upheaval colored the outlook of many during the Dreyfus Affair, especially with a
prominent part being played in it by socialists and anarchists, and with the Dreyfusards organizing many large meetings and demonstrations, any of which might explode into riot, as some did. This helps to explain the acute crisis of October 1898, when there was a conjunction of hysterias, with strikes of construction and railroad workers occurring at the same time as the Fashoda confrontation and rumors of an imminent rightist coup. (See Chapter Two.) Security contingency plans then led to the massive Army intervention in the strikes.

The French security apparatus was also obsessed with espionage by foreign powers, especially Germany. While a few instances of spying were uncovered, the actual danger was minor. Nevertheless, spy paranoia was fed by a combination of feelings— insecurity over the military situation and bellicosity with respect to Germany. France's humiliating defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and consequent loss of territory left many of the French with a passionate desire for revenge, and the assumption that Germany was reciprocally bellicose. By the end of the century the urge to revenge had diminished, but it had contributed to an altered, xenophobic nationalism. Yet France could not be sure of the adequacy of its Army, and this insecurity was much aggravated by a sense of isolation in international affairs. Germany had built anti-French alliances for which France could not compensate until the conclusion of the 1894 Franco-Russian alliance, and that was a relationship of uncertain value.

These factors then provided the context for the sensationalism of the Dreyfus espionage case, and the gravity attributed to the alleged crime. They also contributed powerfully to the urgency with which many rejected any challenge to the Army leaders and condemned their critics. Although domestic politics made the struggle over Dreyfus what it was, the context of military and foreign affairs was essential.

Actually neither the left nor espionage could really subvert the Third Republic, but danger from the right in France was another matter. There were, as we have indicated, many French conservatives who were in no way content with the country's system of government. A century of revolutions had left France with a republican constitution and a political tradition that most citizens regarded with ambivalence if not outright antipathy. The two-decade-old Republic did not function well enough to have engendered general respect or loyalty; many in France would not attach to this regime any national loyalties they had. Ideas of the French revolutionary tradition had widely potent evocative force, but it often was very negative. There were still many people who hated or feared what they thought revolution and republicanism had produced. Even where this tradition evoked positive response, it was mainly a matter of ill-defined symbolism and vague if passionate attitudes. There was no single coherent ideology upon which French republicans could stand firm against challenge or from which they could proceed to reconstitute the system.

One traditional republican passion was anticlericalism, which contributed greatly to deep-seated antirepublicanism among most of the Catholic clergy and a large part of the Catholic faithful. This conflict reflected the larger division between those whose outlooks were formed by Catholicism and the many others with primarily secular perspectives, or those shaped by other religions.

Most French citizens were nominally Catholic, but indifference and agnosticism were common, and irregular observance of rites still more so. Genuine devotion to Catholicism was much more general in some regions than in others. Protestants and Jews formed a significant presence, but more through their supposed weight in French life than through their actual numbers, which were not large. Prejudice against both minorities was substantial, and connected to their imagined influence in the economy and politics. Both groups had been persecuted in the past but had benefited in the nineteenth century from liberal tolerance.

Toward the end of the century this tolerance was countered by growing, virulent antagonism toward Jews and Protestants. Rejection of them was premised upon the rightists' proposition that Catholicism was essential to French identity, and Jews and Protestants were thus unassimilable intruders.

At the same time, the French right was renewing itself, assuming a vigorous, reshaped form on the basis of enmity toward the Republic, which was secular, and insistence upon a vital national being, which was Catholic. By no means all of those adopting such views were pious Catholics; some of those prominent on the right professed Catholic allegiance as a matter of political ideology only, or at least their religious beliefs were not profound. Likewise, very devout Catholics often allowed them-
selves to believe that a politics of rancor was consonant with Christian faith and the God of Love. Catholicism thus was very much embedded in political ideology.

When one looks at the daily practice of politics, the right appears to have been endlessly varied and amorphous. France did not at this time have a regular, stable array of organized political parties. Alliances and voting blocs for electoral and parliamentary purposes were loose and frequently shifting. Nevertheless, elements of the right were linked through a common antipathy to the Republic, and this remained the evident basis of coherence for the right.

In the first years of the Third Republic the right had been essentially monarchist, though divided by differences in ideology and by disagreement over which of several claimants to a French throne should command loyalty. Many on the right were deeply reactionary and unreconciled to the modern political institutions introduced since 1789. Others accepted different parts of that legacy but remained conservative about its application.

Monarchists had firm bases of support in many sections of the country and among influential groups: the clergy, the aristocracy, army officers, and some journalists and men of letters. Nevertheless, after 1879 the electoral strength of republicans was greater, and monarchists were repeatedly frustrated in attempts to supplant them. Two of the three principal royal pretenders died without direct heirs, leaving a poor residue of alternatives upon whom to pin hopes of a revived monarchy. Monarchism suffered further setbacks through failed efforts at a restoration and through Pope Leo XIII’s 1892 encyclical, Inter multiplices sollicitudines, calling upon French Catholics to “rally” in support of the Republic. Most royalists rejected this order, but it undermined their position nevertheless.

These developments helped make monarchism effectively a lost cause, but the more general and profound changes occurring during the same period did more to accomplish that. In a modernizing France, other forms and movements better suited evolving attitudes.

However, the political effects of modernization across the country were highly varied, with minimal political change not confined just to the most backward areas. The political inclinations of each area were shaped through the interaction of so many variable factors that seemingly homogeneous populations were in fact highly differentiated from one small district to the next. With the overall differentiation of individual districts went wide variation both in the weight and nature of modernization’s impact and in political mutability.

In many districts monarchism survived even after it had become a lost cause, although less through voter’s love for kings than through their deference to local notables. Although the motivations of aristocracy and Catholic clergy differed, the bulk of each still refused to accept the consequences of the Revolution of 1789 and continued to keep faith for royalism. Other notables sometimes had similar views. With the right combinations of factors these reactionaries could regularly bring their districts along with them. At the national level this enduring base gave monarchists a political weight that was much reinforced by the sympathy of the elites mentioned earlier and by the personal prestige and the oratorical and writing skills of monarchist spokesmen.

Their politics was scarcely distinguishable from that of other traditionalist conservatives—many of them with similar backgrounds and support in home districts—who had tried to come to terms with the Republic. Leo XIII’s command or lost hope in restoration had made onetime monarchists discard loyalty to a pretender but not change their basic attitudes.

Monarchism and such kindred conservatism were important in the Dreyfus Affair, but not primarily because agents of the pretender attempted coups to restore him. These still influential conservatives fought the Dreyfusards in defense of the Army and the Church, while seeking to transform the Republic in order to realize their vision of what France should be, even without a king.

Their role exemplifies a basic condition of the Affair’s political struggle: Factions could be potent without either a very broad base of popular support or effective party organization. The highly differentiated population provided bases for a wide spectrum of disparate factions, which elicited support mainly through the personal prestige of leaders and the evoking in speech and print of vague but powerful symbols. There was too little room for the politics of compromise and pluralism, but much room for embittered struggle over issues and symbols that seemed vital.

The broad central segment of this spectrum was republican.
French republicanism had once led a continental movement for the radical transformation of civilization, through the reconstitution of government and law. The universal rights of all men, all citizens...equality before the law and liberty under its rule...popular sovereignty...science's mastery over nature and superstition...progress through freeing man's limitless energy and capacity from ancient bonds. Such beliefs belonged to an eighteenth-century legacy, one cherished fiercely in the nineteenth as primary faith by Europeans who fought to make republics an enduring reality. Critics on both the left and right often found such beliefs vague, simplistic, self-interested, and blind to the reality of poverty, but this criticism left most republicans virtually untouched and confident that political virtue was exclusively theirs.

From one generation to the next, French republicanism became ever less radical. Articles of faith that had served well in fighting for the cause lost their power as republican goals were realized, or seemed to be. More important, as the supremacy of the bourgeoisie was established in nearly every sphere, the class no longer needed to preoccupy itself with challenging the old elites. Instead, it felt its own position threatened from below, and the egalitarian premise of republican ideology assumed a different and distressing import. Bourgeois conviction about the actual equality of all men may never have run very deep, but a century after the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789 that idea seemed positively foolhardy.

For many republicans the legacy of radicalism was supplanted by a kind of conservatism, bent upon preventing any disruption of the existing social order. Government served to protect and promote private wealth more than universal human rights. The old formulas of republican ideology were retained, but its onetime fire was largely quenched and the reality of government seemed to be a matter of practical, defensively cautious pursuit of personal and class self-interest.

The radical elements in the republican tradition were not altogether discarded, and they were still cherished by some, but this "social conservatism" was characteristic of the way republicans governed France in the years before the Dreyfus Affair. The long-lasting refusal of so many republicans to entertain the possibility of a new trial for Dreyfus can be partly attributed to these shifts in their political values. Their conservatives' caution made them resistant to anything so likely to disrupt the unstable equilibrium in public affairs, especially when much of the impetus came from the left. And their much attenuated idealism made it difficult for them to be stirred by the injustice said to have been done to Dreyfus and others. Theirs was an anti-Dreyfusism of passive resistance.

Most anti-Dreyfusard activism, on the other hand, came from a "new right," which was reacting against the politics of the Third Republic and against modernity itself. Its reaction was quite different from but linked to the traditionalist conservatism already mentioned. This new right was heterogeneous, but its different segments had some common themes and purposes; in particular, there was a general urge to obtain substantial change in both the constitutional form and the animating spirit of France's government. In this sense and in its hostility to the republicanism of the dominant parties, this new right was antirepublican—and in 1898 "Long live the Republic!" was immediately understood as a provocative Dreyfusard slogan. However, most of its spokesmen affirmed their dedication to a republic, though not to this one as it stood.

Calling this current of opinion the "new right" and saying it was reactionary and antimodern suggests that it should also be regarded as conservative. So it should, yet it had radical, even revolutionary elements, involved a sort of demagogic populism, and included some who called themselves socialists (although they were not accepted as such by most socialists).

The new right's antipathy to the Third Republic involved a complex of reactions against current practice of both parliamentarism and democracy. By the late 1880s this reaction had begun to coalesce. There were concerted attacks upon the regime, especially in association with the Boulangist agitation of 1887–89 and uproar over the Wilson and Panama scandals in 1887 and 1892. Criticism of the Republic was given further definition during the 1890s in the discourse of politicians, journalists, and men of letters. As antipathy became more fully defined and frequently expressed, the way was prepared for a clash that would be much more severe than any before.

The Boulangist agitation involved an attempt to bring a popular general to power. General Boulanger had managed to appeal widely both to left republicans and to patriots who thought that national vitality had been sapped by a corrupt regime. The stink
of alleged corruption was intensified by discovery that the President's son-in-law, Daniel Wilson, was conducting a busy trade in official decorations (like the Legion of Honor), and operating this commerce right in the Presidential Palace. The Republic was badly shaken by the ensuing crisis, then was threatened anew and more gravely by a vigorous campaign across the country to make Boulanger the national savior, if need be setting aside constitutional process to do it. Support for the general came from many quarters, inspired by hopes for a government genuinely responsive to the people, for national regeneration, or even for restoration of king or emperor.

When in fear of arrest Boulanger fled to Belgium on April Fool's Day, 1889, the movement soon dissolved, but the sentiments and personalities that had driven it lived on. (With no money or friends left, the general himself committed suicide in 1891, at the grave of his mistress.) In 1892 came a fresh shock: the collapse of the company formed to build a canal across Panama. Investors lost enormous sums, much of which had been obtained through government support of the venture. It was revealed that there had been massive bribery of large numbers of politicians and journalists, including some of the most prominent republican leaders. It was a perfect opportunity for those who thought this regime beyond redemption, and they made the most of it. Panama did not provide them a long enough lever to overturn the Republic, but from then on verbal attack upon it was increasingly strident and potentially dangerous.

The immediate focal point of opposition was the apparent corruption and ineffectuality of parliamentary government. Recent history seemed to prove that politicians were concerned with enriching themselves individually and with securing their party and class interests, without care for morality, law, or the interests of France as a whole. Limited government accomplishment and frequent changes of ministries appeared to demonstrate constitutional inability to act effectively, no matter how urgent the need. To many it seemed that the Republic had no firmly determined policy except the suppression of potential antirepublican sentiment, especially through persecution of the Catholic Church.

Behind this rightist perception of corruption and ineffectuality lay other attitudes and ideas, which varied with the opponents. Their objectives were nevertheless comparable. They would end corruption by substituting some higher morality for the egoism that had prevailed in the Third Republic until then. Ineffectuality would be ended by rendering political authority less diffuse and more firmly determined.

Many opponents had no definite program for accomplishing these purposes. Others prescribed constitutional change, transferring some power from governing ministries and the parliamentary Chambers to the President of the Republic. More drastic solutions involved instituting some basically authoritarian regime, with decisions of the national leadership confirmed by plebiscites, and with the new regime perhaps achieved through a popularly supported coup d'état. This was supposed to be democratic, since the people would speak through plebiscites, as well as through a more restricted use of voting to select officials. In addition, the Affair was to give birth to the neoroyalism of the Action Française. This sought rule by a hereditary monarch as the logical way to have authority centered in someone who would always remain above the self-interest and instability of partisan politics.

Among the attackers, typical bourgeois conservatives wanted only limited change, making the national leadership more undivided, authoritative, and stable in order to resist the threats of social upheaval and socialism or anarchism. Part of their charge against the Republic was its supposed vulnerability to the mob and to the rising parliamentary influence of the left, especially socialists. But at the same time there were others, radicals of the right, who thought the existing regime much too unresponsive to the will and needs of the people. The urge to plebiscitary "democracy" was felt by many onetime left republicans, as well as Bonapartists. For both the populism of the 1789 Revolution's Jacobin tradition remained important, but they sought to fulfill its promise through creating a popular authoritarian regime.

While some of these populists carried on the anticlericalism of the republican tradition, another strain of radical populism sought to make the Church once more the vital center of national life. In this vision, the Church drew all people to its bosom, rescued the unfortunate, and shaped the moral core of the community; it provided salvation in both this life and the next. The community was sustained by legions of simple priests and nuns selflessly devoting their lives to serving the ordinary people of
France, and Catholicism was the opposite of the Republic's uncaring inhumanity and rationalist amorality.

Some Catholic populists drew upon the tradition of Jacobin democracy, despite its anticlericalism. In the Church all were equal, as they had proved not to be in the bourgeois Republic. However, the counter-Revolutionary tradition of the century since 1789 also contributed to this populism, with long-nurtured hatred of the Republic giving it added force. Priests played a prominent part in this—especially those of the Assumptionist order—and thereby reinforced, loyal republicans in their view that clericalism was more than ever the archenemy of the Republic.

With all their variety, opponents of the Republic did find common ground, and they found it in nationalism, with a new twist. French nationalism had long been typically republican. This older nationalism sprang from belief in the fraternity and equality of all humanity, because all men are rational beings and thus fundamentally the same. France was simply the most advanced civilization on a road all would travel; thus it was the leader on mankind's march to liberation. Although in practice less pure about its universalism than in this ideal, republican nationalism was not exclusive. Rather it aimed at spreading the virtue of French civilization to less fortunate peoples. Both in this and with its faith in liberalism, science, and progress, the republican tradition differed sharply from the nationalism developing on the right.

The new nationalism stemmed to begin with from the humiliation of defeat in the 1870–71 war with Prussia. Compensating for the disaster's shock led to exaltation of France as superior by her very nature—along with attribution of the defeat to moral and spiritual decline of the nation. Whatever one did not like about contemporary France could be identified as a cause of the degeneration. Even though not created until after the defeat, the Third Republic was often blamed, by accusing the republican opposition to the pre-1870 imperial government and by regarding France as corrupted by republicanism ever since 1789.

Military calamity and a desire for revenge had provided the occasion for an upsurge of nationalism, but not for its departure from the old republican form. As the decades passed, nationalist sentiment continued to intensify among much the same politically engaged individuals who were so aggrieved by the Republic. Their dissatisfaction was not simply political in origin. Such characteristics of modern culture as rapacious and exploitative capitalism, the filth of urban industry, and new philosophical and literary modes repelled and even terrified them. They saw all this as corruption or loss of the virtue and spirit that had animated man.

Many of the people thus disturbed knew only from a distance much of what they so disliked and dreaded; its very unfamiliarity made distaste more likely. Often it was a matter of felt vulnerability to forces beyond ken or control, feelings probably common to much of the population. These forces were human ones, the agencies and creations of modernizing civilization.

For provincial farmers or small businessmen the alien powers might be simply wholesale markets in distant cities, railroads, or the Paris stock exchange. For the men of letters, journalists, and others articulating discontent, the trouble lay in rationalization of modern culture. Decadence resulted from substituting the artificial constructs of intellect for practices and ideas that grew naturally through man's experience.

Those who said this wanted in effect to replace machines with mystiques, the overarching mystique being that of the nation. La Patrie—the Fatherland—was the land, the earth itself, and the generations that had lived, died, and been buried there. It was one people united by the heritage of that land and those generations by common blood, common language, common culture, common history. Modern rationality cared little for that organic unity, and in the name of progress divided and corrupted the nation by forcing upon it innovations alien to its nature.

So went the mythology of the new nationalism. If there was actually little unity in France, any perception of this was submerged in passionate conviction or explained away. Social class divisions, for example, were symptoms of modern decadence. Regional differences were integral to traditional France, whose superior being incorporated all into the whole. Religious differences were the consequence of alien incursions (Genevan Protestantism and Oriental Judaism) and the sins of abstract intellect (freethinking). Political divisions could disappear if true patriotism became the basic determinant of politics.

The myth was complete, persuasive, and impervious to counterargument. It may not have gained the widest currency in
a country where national sentiment of any kind was still not well established. Yet it could be a potent propaganda instrument, if nationalist spokesmen could get audiences to associate the unwanted effects of modern change they felt with the targets of attack.

And there stood the Third Republic, the self-proclaimed champion of modernity, the obvious target, one that seemed to represent all the others. In particular, the Republic embodied the impersonally rational approach to judgment and action supposed to be characteristic of modernity. Thus, liberal parliamentarism was obnoxious because of its ideal that disinterested, reasoned debate should make policy and because it was seen as responding much more to special interests than to national ones. Liberal individualism—the essence of republican philosophy—was still more opposed to organic nationalism in practice than in its basic idea: Individualist pursuit of self-interest was believed especially responsible for national division and decline. The republican dream of progress relied upon the fruits of scientific thought and would have science supplant religious faith; but science involved above all the unnatural constructs of intellect that nationalists found so abhorrent.

Above all, the nationalists sought spiritual and moral vitality, part of their metaphor of the nation as organism, and saw decadence as national enervation. They believed that the prevailing republicans could not appreciate how essential was this vitality, for there was little room in the republicans' rationalist tradition for such a mystique. Thus, however much the Republic pursued national purposes, like preparing recovery of territory lost to Germany, it could not fulfill the requirements of the new nationalists. Instead, it had to be made over, not reformed but transcended into a truly national regime—one that would be moral and animate instead of amoral and artificial.

Patriotism itself was a higher morality to rescue France from decadence, but patriotism needed institutional embodiment, and neither the contemporary State nor its chiefs could yet be that. Catholicism was the obvious answer: It provided moral and spiritual foundations, and it was regarded as a major part of France's traditional core. Many nationalists were devoted Catholics, though many others looked to the Church primarily for tactical reasons. Thus the new nationalism was usually clerical, but often not particularly religious:

However, the Church was not a sufficient vehicle with which to carry patriotism. For one thing, anticlericalism remained a passion for some nationalist militants and for many whose support the nationalists hoped to win. For another, there was the unacceptable Papal encyclical commanding cooperation with the Republic. More generally, it seemed to many nationalists that the Church had compromised itself and had failed to be a staunch enough champion of the nation. Even the Catholic populists thought the Church had departed from its vital role and had to be brought back.

The primary embodiment of the national ideal was the Army. Despite the frightful incompetence of its effort in the 1870 war, the Army came to be seen as the one major institution unsullied by its part in modern developments. One contemporary of the Affair called the Army "the age-old institution binding us to the past—not mingled with the nation but above it, . . . bearing the role, the lofty mission of the protector of society, once belonging to the Church, but which the Church can fulfill no longer."

The nationalist mystique required an ethic of discipline, courage, readiness to act forcefully, honor, and devotion of self to nation. These antique virtues assumed fresh importance in their supposed opposition to the perceived vices of a decadent society. With yearning for renewal of these military qualities came nostalgia for a lost past in which they were thought to have prevailed. Added to this were still fierce desires for revenge against Germany and recovery of Alsace and Lorraine. The result was a cult of the soldier, which had taken form soon after the 1870 defeat and grew with the new nationalism. The soldier not only was bearer of the purified ethic, he was above factional struggle, for his sole cause was that of France. Only he could bring cohesion to the divided land.

This cult began with impassioned rhetoric and poetry. The greatest impact was due to the poetry of Paul Dérouléde, who during the Affair was to lead quixotic attempts at a coup d'état. His verse, appearing in many editions from 1872 on, glorified the Army and created a legend of its heroism in 1870.

In France, which everything divides,
What Frenchman takes for his device
Each one for all, and all for France?
The Soldier.
MORE THAN A TRIAL

In these our hours of indifference,
Who keeps deep in his heart a hope
Which everything strikes, but does not destroy?
The Soldier.

Who makes the rounds when all do sleep?
When all in peril are, who keeps the watch?
Who suffers, who dies, who fights?
The Soldier.

Oh role immense! Oh holy task!
On march without cries, falls without complaint
Who works for our redemption?
The Soldier.

And on his tomb obscure and proud,
For recompense and for prayer
What would he want carved there?
“A Soldier.”

Initially the cult of the soldier and Army lacked precise intellectual form but gained it as some of the most talented minds in France constructed a nationalist theory. In it they treated the Army as the essential foundation of national unity, because its disciplined and hierarchical structure made it immune to division and instability. Thus it was the necessary antithesis to the most despised characteristics of civilian politics.

Militarist cultism and a rationale of the Army as unifier made a very effective combined appeal. However, the Army was actually a major cause of political division, between champions and opponents of the military. Much opposition to the Army resulted from thinking it politically reactionary. Thus, antimilitarism intensified when reactionary civilians made so much of the military’s importance for political salvation. Divisions deepened with reciprocal interaction of antimilitarists versus nationalists and soldiers.

As should be expected, the officers of the French Army were indeed conservative and nationalistic. By late in the century the officer corps had become a haven for aristocrats with few other opportunities in a bourgeois age, and they were still more conservative than their middle-class brethren. Many of them had monarchist sympathies. Some officers, including even senior ones, may have been at least nominal republicans, but their republicanism often was only grudging acceptance of the inevitables or opportunism for sake of careers. The officers were rather like cloistered monks, having limited contact with civilians and bound to a military society that molded their views and demanded conformity to its prevailing values.

Whatever their opinions, French officers generally kept themselves aloof from civilian politics, as indeed was required by the state. Despite almost universal hostility among officers toward the Dreyfusards, the fears of the latter that the Army would join or initiate a coup d’état had little basis. Any officer sentiment in that direction could not develop far enough to overcome long-established restraints.

However, the officer corps was accustomed to autonomy in conducting most aspects of their Army’s affairs. Intervention by Dreyfusards demanding revision of a court-martial was quite intolerable. The officers’ resistance was the reflex of a closed corporation affronted by the creatures they found most contemptible: politicians, intellectuals, hack journalists, Jews.

Contempt, distrust, and animosity were the common coinage of social intercourse in France. If war between states is an extension of international politics, French domestic politics was an extension of chronic civil war. Much of the time the warfare was covered by a façade of prosperity and conventional civility, but public debate often deteriorated into brawls, even in the national parliament. Political invective was a highly developed art form, much practiced in the press and on rostrums, with audiences actively expressing their outrage or delight. The open antagonism so often displayed in words suggests that there were acute and pervasive hostilities that otherwise were not readily exposed to view.

Nowhere was this violence more evident than in the rapid upsurge later in the century of hatred against Jews, Freemasons, and Protestants.