breaching the very center of republican power. The bomb thrower, an impoverished worker named Auguste Vaillant, was caught, convicted, and executed. A week after Vaillant's execution, Émile Henry (who had gone underground following his earlier "deed" in 1892) set off a bomb at the Café Terminus near the Saint Lazare train station in central Paris. One diner was killed, 20 others injured. An outraged crowd caught Henry and took him to the police. The artisans, white-collar workers, and merchants who frequented the Café Terminus, people who had been sympathetic to the anarchist cause, were stunned.

With fear mounting, in December 1893, the legislature responded to the anarchist attacks by passing a series of laws, known as the "scoundrel's laws" (les lois scélérates), that outlawed the encouragement or even approval of past or future attacks and forbade association with individuals who "intended" to be "vivisectionists." Undeterred, anarchist intellectual Félix Fénéon explained his approval of such anarchist acts. Henry's bomb at the Café Terminus, he argued, rather than killing the innocent, was aimed at "a voting public" as guilty as anyone else for the Republic's crimes.

Alone among the theorists and intellectuals, Fénéon did not stop at the propaganda of the word. In 1894, he turned to practicing the deed. In April, he ignited a bomb in the restaurant of the fashionable Foyot Hotel. Ironically, the only diner injured was the critic Laurent Tailhade, who had declared after Vaillant's attack, "What matters the victims if the gesture is beautiful?" Tailhade lost an eye but not his fervor for the cause. Then, in June 1894, an Italian anarchist, Cesare Sarto, avenged the refusal to pardon Vaillant for his victimless attack of the Chamber of Deputies, murdered French President Sadi Carnot. The angry public attacked the local Italian Consulate in Lyon where the murder took place and sacked an Italian restaurant. In response, the Republic passed a third "scoundrel's law" prohibiting all expressions of anarchist propaganda, in June 1894. In the subsequent police crackdown, Fénéon, although he had never been charged with his crime, was arrested. He was among 30 suspects brought to trial in the summer of 1894.

The "Trial of the Thirty" quickly became a cause célèbre. Fénéon's sharp wit turned the trial into a spectacle. For example, when the judge claimed that Fénéon was seen speaking to two other anarchists behind a lamppost, the urban defendant replied, "Can you tell me, your Honor, where behind a lamp-post is?" Ultimately, the jury cleared Fénéon and his fellow defendants. The bombings waned and eventually stopped after the trial's conclusion, but they reflected the deepening divide between the bourgeois Republic and its critics and created an atmosphere of fear that was slow to dissipate. It is perhaps this fear that accounts for the overheated reaction of the nation to a new scandal that broke out in the fall of 1894, when a spy was discovered in the ranks of the army. An officer named Alfred Dreyfus was promptly arrested and court-martialed—launching what was eventually to become the Republic's greatest challenge to date: the Dreyfus Affair.

CHAPTER 5
The Republic Divided
1894–1914

Calmm and courteous, Gaston Calmette welcomed Henriette Caillaux to his office at the Paris newspaper Le Figaro on March 16, 1914. The editor's demeanor was impressive; after all, for nearly three months Calmette had led a vicious editorial campaign against his visitor's husband, Joseph Caillaux, the leading Radical politician of the day. Over the years, Caillaux had served as minister of finance, responsible for introducing the nation's first income tax law, as well as prime minister, intent on seeking peaceful relations with Germany. While neither of these policies sat well with the conservative and nationalist Le Figaro, the newspaper did not debate the issues; instead, under Calmette's guidance, it engaged in character assassination, revealing intimate letters Caillaux had written to a former mistress. Just the day before Madame Caillaux's visit, Calmette's paper reproduced a facsimile of one of these letters.

Before Calmette could invite his visitor to take a seat, she asked, "You know why I have come?" When Calmette replied he did not, Caillaux pulled a pistol from the folds of her fur coat and shot him dead. Grabbed by Calmette's employees, Caillaux was arrested, jailed, and charged with murder. By the time the sensational trial began, on July 20, the affair had so mesmerized the public and press that events elsewhere were largely ignored. Remarkably, this indifference extended to the series of events in central Europe that would trigger World War I just a couple of weeks later. Instead of giving the diplomatic situation the attention it required, newspapers focused so intensely upon the Caillaux Affair as to create the illusion that virtually nothing else existed.

The nineteenth century, most historians noted, came to an end in 1914. But in a sense, the curtain in France fell not in August, when Europe was pulled into the vortex of World War I, but several months earlier with the Caillaux Affair. The product of developments that characterized French society in the first decade of the new century, the Caillaux Affair grew out of a fascination with psychology and its focus on the implacable power of the unconscious, a burgeoning nationalist fervor, ever more closely identified with the political Right, an embattled
stereotype of women as domestic creatures governed by their emotions, not their intellects, and a crisis of masculinity festering ever since France’s defeat by Germany in 1870. All these factors were compounded by an ever more influential mass press, which blurred the lines between the public and private, information and sensationalism. Many of the threads that grew fatally knotted by 1914 had been spun 20 years earlier.

THE DREYFUS AFFAIR

In 1894—the same year as the anarchist Trial of the Thirty—another “affair” and trial took place: the court-martial of a French army officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus. All three trials shared common traits, especially in the ways they reflected the changing political and ideological challenges confronting the Republic. In 1894 as in 1914, mainstream leaders of the Third Republic stirred deepening hostility at both ends of the political spectrum. In fact, both the radical Left and the radical Right denied the Republic’s legitimacy: it was the oppressor of the working class for the extreme Left, the unnatural product of abstract reason and cosmopolitan values for the extreme Right. Worlds apart on nearly every issue, anarchist theorists like Père Louis and ultra-right ideologues like Charles Maurras, the founder of the anti-republican, royalist movement Action Française, were joined by their hatred of la guerre, or the slut—the pejorative term her enemies gave to Marianne, the female allegory symbolizing the French Republic. While the Republic eventually prevailed—even emerged strengthened—the Dreyfus Affair posed a serious challenge to its stability.

In December 1894, Captain Dreyfus, assigned to the Army General Staff, was charged with passing military secrets to Germany. The damning piece of evidence was a memorandum, or bordereau, sent to the German military attaché in Paris. The bordereau, found in a trash can at the German embassy by a French spy posing as a cleaning lady, listed for a German military officer a series of confidential French military documents. Although the bordereau was not signed, suspicions fell immediately on Dreyfus, partly because his family was from Alsace, a region ceded to Germany in 1871, and partly because he was the only Jew on the General Staff.

At his court-martial, several handwriting experts testified that Dreyfus’s handwriting did not match that on the handwritten bordereau. In response, the prosecution called Alphonse Bertillon, who declared that Dreyfus had deliberately tried to disguise his handwriting. Bertillon illustrated his thesis with an array of charts and enlarged photographs—a performance that convinced most spectators that Bertillon himself was insane. Yet the army insisted on Dreyfus’s guilt—so much so that to clinch its case, it introduced hearsay evidence and a secret dossier of incriminating reports, which eventually turned out to have been forged. The judges reviewed the dossier without notifying Dreyfus or his attorneys.

Within days, on December 22, 1894, Dreyfus was found guilty of treason and sentenced to life deportation. Two weeks later, in the courtyard of the Ecole Militaire, Dreyfus’s epaulets were torn off and his sword broken—a military degradation watched by a crowd that included the right-wing nationalist Maurice Barrès, the great actress Sarah Bernhardt, and the future Zionist Theodor Herzl. On January 17, Dreyfus was bundled from his Paris prison in the dead of night, bound in leg irons and handcuffs to start his long journey to Devil’s Island. For the next four and one-half years, Dreyfus was the lone prisoner on this heat-blasted and malarial rock off the South American coast of French Guiana, where his guards, forbidden to talk with him, were ordered to “blow his brains out” should an unidentified ship approach the island.

The Affair revealed important ideological, social, and political forces at work in fin-de-siècle France. First, the army, after the humiliation of 1870, had become a critical source of national pride. As Maurice Barrès observed, “The choice is clear: . . . On the one hand, there is Dreyfus’ honor; on the other, there is the honor of all the ministers and generals who have sworn to Dreyfus’ guilt.” The debates in France when the Dreyfus case first became public concerned not Dreyfus’s guilt, but his punishment. Some people criticized Dreyfus’s sentence as too lenient. Even important figures on the republican Left, like Clemenceau and Jaures, declared that Dreyfus had only escaped the firing squad thanks to his social connections, since he came from a well-to-do family. Indeed, at first few people beyond Dreyfus’s immediate family, particularly his wife Lucie and brother Mathieu, believed in his innocence. In their efforts to reopen the case, the Dreyfus family met resistance everywhere, including the French Jewish community, which was worried that advocating a new trial for Dreyfus would be seen as confirmation that they cared more about their sectarian interests than about the good of the French nation.

Support for Dreyfus came from unlikely places. Anarchist sympathizer and literary critic Bernard Lazare joined forces with the Dreyfus family in 1895. Like Jaures and Clemenceau, Lazare at first dismissed the trial and conviction of Dreyfus as a bourgeois affair of no interest to anyone beyond the Dreyfus family. But after a series of meetings with Mathieu Dreyfus, in which he learned about the nature of the court-martial, Lazare concluded that Dreyfus had been framed. The dangers posed by anti-Semitism and nationalism trumped Lazare’s ideological indifference to the fate of a wealthy officer. In 1896 Lazare published A Judicial Error: The Truth about the Dreyfus Affair, a powerful critique of the trial that forced the case back into the public arena.

While the former anarchist was completing his pamphlet, an equally improbable figure joined the ranks of Dreyfus’s defenders. In March 1896, the newly installed head of army intelligence, Lieutenant Colonel Georges Picquart, discovered documents that pointed to Commandant Esterhazy, a Hungarian émigré serving on the General Staff, as the author of the bordereau. An anti-Semitic himself, Picquart nonetheless found himself appalled by the miscarriage of justice. However, his superior officers, not in the least concerned by the miscarriage of justice, were convinced that reopening the Dreyfus case would badly damage the army’s reputation. When Picquart apprised his superiors of his discovery of evidence against Esterhazy, the army silenced and demoted Picquart with a transfer to a desert outpost in Tunisia.
Worried by Picquart's discovery, Colonel Joseph Henry, an army intelligence officer, fastened the "secret dossier" by forging additional documents that implicated Dreyfus. Henry justified the forgeries on the grounds of patriotism. He firmly believed that preserving the honor of the military counted more than Dreyfus's actual innocence or guilt. Henry's anti-Semitism also colored his view of the case. After all, Dreyfus's "race" necessarily made him a traitor. While Henry was adding forged proof of guilt to Dreyfus's file, Picquart relayed his findings about Dreyfus's innocence to a fellow Alsatian, the vice president of the Senate, Auguste Scheurer-Kestner. In a letter to his colleagues, Senator Scheurer-Kestner declared that Dreyfus's court-martial was "unspeakable in the nineteenth century and that it dishonored the Republic."

With great reluctance, the army opened an inquiry and eventually held a new court-martial to consider the charges leveled against Esterhazy, the likely author of the bordereau. In January 1898, the military judges, deliberating less than three minutes, returned a verdict of "not guilty" for Esterhazy. With their decision, the judges hoped to keep Dreyfus securely locked away on Devil's Island. But at this very moment the affair shifted from the narrow confines of the courtroom to the stage of public opinion. The affair, in a word, became the "Affair."" THE "AFFAIR"

By the end of the nineteenth century, the popular press had become an important vehicle for public opinion. Galvanized by the liberal press law of 1881 that lifted the strict censorship rules imposed by the Second Empire and maintained during the "Moral Order" era, newspapers had already joined in the many political battles of the Third Republic. However, the lines between analysis and opinion, journalism and sensationalism, were at best blurred. Tellingly, many papers carried serialized novels on their front page. These popular novels blended a number of ingredients—innocent victims, improbable plot twists, and colorful characters—that were also hallmarks of the Dreyfus Affair. Among the most successful practitioners of the serialized novel was Émile Zola. Yet unlike many of his fellow novelists—or, for that matter, many journalists—Zola was a dogged researcher whose works exposed the gap between republican rhetoric and the brutal social and economic realities of the era. By 1898, he was at the height of his fame. Liberals hailed his completed cycle of novels, the Rougon-Macquart, as a masterpiece, while many conservatives, shocked by Zola's open portrayal of drinking and sex in his novels, dismissed them as obscene. Zola, skeptical of the army's case against Dreyfus, was stunned by Esterhazy's rapid acquittal. The court-martial's refusal to recognize the real culprit left Dreyfus's family and supporters deeply depressed and demoralized. Yet rather than giving up, Zola went on the attack, publishing an astonishing letter in Clemenceau's newspaper L'Aurore. Addressed to the president of France, Félix Faure, Zola's letter, provocatively titled "J'Accuse!" ("I Accuse!") dismantled the case against Dreyfus point by point, identifying by name the officers responsible for committing this "slandering" against the Republic. Lucid and incisive, the letter transformed the affair. 

"Truth is on the march." Zola's stirring declaration electrified Dreyfus's supporters, known as Dreyfusards. For the Dreyfusards, individual rights, including the right to a fair trial, were paramount, and no damage to the army's reputation could justify imprisoning an innocent man. They also began to suspect not just that people within the military had concocted evidence to convict Dreyfus and then covered up their actions, but that the army as a whole, in conjunction with other nefarious, anti-republican forces like the Catholic Church and royalists, had joined together in a vast conspiracy. Thus the person of Dreyfus mattered less to many Dreyfusards than the principles they defended and the enemies they believed they struggled against.

In the short term, Zola's letter failed to change Dreyfus's situation. In February 1898, Zola was hauled into court by the former minister of war whose article had named, General Mercier, and found guilty of libel. Facing a jail sentence and threatened by anti-Dreyfusard mobs, the novelist fled to Britain. But anti-Dreyfusards were not yet satisfied. The army imprisoned Colonel Picquart for revealing military secrets to the press, and Scheurer-Kestner was forced to stop...
down as vice president of the Senate. On what basis did Dreyfus’s enemies discount the mounting evidence of his innocence? Military officers, mostly old aristocratic elites vaguely anti-Semitic in orientation and unreconciled to a republican government, clearly believed that the army’s honor was at stake and took every measure they could to prevent Dreyfus’s conviction from being overturned. To monarchists and extreme right-wing nationalists, Dreyfus and his supporters threatened the army and therefore the nation.

This anti-Dreyfusard emphasis on the nation revealed just how much the Right had changed by the 1890s. For much of the nineteenth century, conservatives on the Right remained principally attached to the monarchy and the Catholic Church—leaving nationalism to the Left. From the 1789 Revolution on, the republican Left created, used, and owned nationalism as a way of empowering the people against those seeking to dominate and oppress them. For republicans, France embodied the abstract values of the Revolution and the Enlightenment. The declaration of the French League for the Defense of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the world’s first human rights organization founded in 1898 in response to the Dreyfus Affair, underscored this revolutionary pedigree: “Each of us has a great mission to accomplish. We must make known and loved the ideas of Justice, Truth and Liberty.” By the nineteenth century’s end, however, the Right began to redefine and claim nationalism for itself.

Right-wing, anti-Dreyfusard nationalists had a different idea of France from that of the Left. Rather than the vehicle of abstract, Enlightened values, the French nation was, according to Barère’s famous formula, formed by “la terre et les morts”—“the soil and the dead.” This organic, even racial form of nationalism—hardly surprising in an imperialist age—distinguished, in the writer Charles Maurras’s phrase, between “legal” France and “real” France. The 1789 Revolution gave rise to the notion that a constitution created a nation of laws, “legal” France. Maurras rejected that notion, arguing instead that the nation rests on a people linked, by ancestry, to a particular territory. Some right-wing nationalists, like Barère, favored a populist, plebiscitary, or Bonapartist regime that occasionally would cement popular support by inviting the public to vote its approval. In this way, through mass actions with little choice, the “individual is absorbed by the family, race and nation.”

Others, like Maurras, insisted upon natural social hierarchies. Natural elites would rule a hierarchical society that required the restoration of the monarchy. In both cases, this new right-wing, “integral” nationalism promoted a vision of the nation as an organic entity, a people determined by ancestry, tied to the soil, and opposed to external and internal foes threatening its purity.

These nationalists despised the Third Republic and everything it stood for. To this degree, they made common cause with the old monarchist Right. And yet the old and new Rights shared little apart from a common enemy. The new Right was, in many respects, an avatar of the fascist movements that would scar European history in the twentieth century. During the last years of the nineteenth century, a number of militant “leagues” appeared in Paris. Rather than traditional parties that accepted the rules and values of the republican system, the leagues contested the system from without. The most notable movements were the Anti-Semitic League, founded in 1897 by Jules Guérin; the Committee of Action Française, created in 1898 by Maurras and Maurice Pujo; and the Federation of Yellows, established by Pierre Bietry in 1902. While each of these movements took on the character of its particular leader, they were nevertheless marked by three common traits: the idealization of violence (practiced in the street no less than in the press), the rejection of existing political principles (most often they defined themselves by what they opposed: i.e., they were anti-parliamentarian, anti-democratic, anti-liberal), and, perhaps most important, the effort to find a “third way” that bypassed the usual divisions of Right and Left, capitalism and socialism, liberalism and conservatism.

Linked to the new, anti-republican nationalism, the Dreyfus Affair also served as the crucible for the creation of a new kind of racial anti-Semitism. No longer the preserve of the Catholic Church, anti-Semitism had achieved the status of an ideology: a bundle of contradictory ideas that supposedly offered a key to the mysteries of the modern age. Jews were not merely outsiders because they were not Christians, they were also outsiders by ancestry. From being a religious minority, Jews had come to be viewed as a biological threat to the purity of the French nation. The most notorious purveyor of this new form of French anti-Semitism was Edouard Drumont. In 1886, he penned La France Juive (Jewish France), a two-volume denunciation of what he viewed as the corrosive presence of Jews in French politics and culture. The book quickly sold more than 100,000 copies, exploiting widespread anxiety and fears spurred by a rapidly changing economy and society.

In the phantasmagoric world portrayed by Drumont and his peers, the Jews was transformed into a mythical and mutually contradictory being. He was both the wealthy banker who crushed small shopkeepers and workers and the socialist militant who exploited these very same victims. As the Catholic newspaper La Croix put it, “Don’t these ‘revolutionaries’ and ‘financiers’ pursue the same goal? Namely, the ruination of small owners, small shopkeepers, small farmers: in a word, the real France?” The great upheavals convulsing French society, according to Drumont, issued from the “savage energy of Jewish invaders” that would forever remain a foreign body within France. In 1889, Drumont founded the Anti-Semitic League to militate against Jews; in 1892, he capitalized on his earlier successes by launching the anti-Semitic newspaper La Libre Parole (Free Speech).

Drumont viewed Dreyfus as symptomatic of the threat Jews posed to France. Under his and the Anti-Semitic League’s impetus, the streets began to throng. During the Dreyfus Affair, the League organized anti-Semitic demonstrations; crowds chanted: “Throw the kites in the water” and “Death to the Jews.” Popular unrest and violence occurred even in cities with little or no Jewish presence, like Rennes and Saint-Malo in Brittany. The danger was greatest in the city of Algiers, which the settler community in Algeria had made their capital. Home to a relatively large Jewish community, Algiers became a critical arena for anti-Semitic French politicians who stirred the volatile settler community—many of whom members had long resented the citizenship granted to Algerian Jews by the 1870 Crémieux
decreed—to bursts of violence. In response to the Dreyfus Affair, waves of rioting, pillaging, and killing of Jewish residents swept the city of Algiers. In the elections of May 1898, Algiers elected Edouard Drumont as its deputy.

Anti-Semitism, the new right-wing nationalism, and fierce defense of the army against any and all critics—all were intensified by the era’s pervasive fears about French masculinity. A familiar anti-Semitic trope represented Jews as effeminate, fearful cowards, a characterization frequently used against Dreyfus himself. The Affair itself spawned a huge number of duels, signaling the underlying gender anxiety. Surprisingly, bourgeois men, lawyers, judges, and journalists took up this old, aristocratic practice, quick to defend their honor against any and all assaults, which is how they interpreted any questioning of their roles in the Dreyfus case. Dueling, which was, strictly speaking, illegal, also surprisingly rarely resulted in death. The real man had to be willing to face death in defense of his honor. Radical leader Clemenceau alone engaged in over 20 duels. French nationalists on both the Left and the Right supported dueling as a way of reinforcing masculine honor and courage.11

Nationalist fervor, racism, and pro-army sentiment were also stoked in the spring and summer of 1898 by a dangerous new development on the colonial front. In an abandoned fort on the Upper Nile in a remote corner of eastern Africa, a tiny column of French and African soldiers led by Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand faced a much larger and better-armed English force under the command of Lord Kitchener. Both were there to claim this particular piece of the continent for their respective countries, and the question was whether war—a real possibility in an increasingly belligerent age—with Britain could be averted. For this to happen, one side would have to swallow its pride and accept the humiliation of withdrawal. The obvious candidate was Marchand: not only were his forces outnumbered, but the French claim to the Upper Nile was considerably more tenuous than Britain’s. For the latter, control of the Upper Nile was essential to safeguarding the British protectorate in Egypt, established in 1882 at the expense of French influence there.

But Marchand, and more importantly the mass media and colonial lobby who lionized him, was not so easily persuaded. It was a symptom of the era that ever since the mid-1890s, an aggressive demand for “revenge” against Britain’s “odious spoliation” of Egypt had arisen among politicians and publicists on both sides of the political spectrum more commonly motivated by hatred of Germany.12 Parliament had overwhelmingly voted for the expedition headed by Marchand, a highly popular hero of the earlier French military campaigns against Ahmadu and Samori in West Africa. Marchand’s mission was very clearly to cross Africa from west to east and claim the Upper Nile for France. Marchand had set out in May 1898, and in late September 1898 news reached Paris that he had safely arrived in Fashoda. Kitchener and Marchand, it turned out, met on September 19, and Kitchener demanded that the French evacuate the fort and abandon any claim to the region. Back in France, right-wing nationalists and their newspapers suddenly saw in Marchand a potential new Boulanger and insisted that he stay put at Fashoda.

THE DÉNOUEMENT

Yet as Marchand mania, Anglophobia, and warmongering was escalating, the army’s case against Dreyfus began to come undone. In August 1898, Colonel Henry, confronted by a fellow officer, confessed to having forged the secret documents in the Dreyfus file. Arrested and placed in the prison of Mont Valérien in a western suburb of Paris on August 30, Henry committed suicide that same night. A rash of resignations, led by the army chief of staff and minister of war, followed. At the same time, Esterhazy, by then living safely in exile in England, admitted that he had indeed written the bordereau and was the real culprit. Obstacles remained. Drumont led a successful campaign to raise money to commemorate Henry’s
suicide as a "patriotic sacrifice"; the 25,000 contributors to the "Henry Monument" were clearly unprepared to accept a retrial. Many government leaders, including the Opportunists in power when Dreyfus was first convicted, repeatedly raised institutional obstacles to revisiting the Dreyfus trial. President Faure consistently opposed reopening the Dreyfus trial, while successive prime ministers were either hostile to Dreyfusards or lackluster in the face of fierce army stonewalling. The only initiative managed by France's paralyzed government in the fall of 1898 was to order Marchand, on November 4, to abandon Falaise. War had been avoided but at the cost of France's complete humiliation, which only served to harden the anti-Dreyfusards' resolve to topple the Republic.

Time, however, was not on the side of the nationalists. In early 1899, President Faure's tenure came to a sudden end—he died of a stroke while in his mistress's arms at the presidential Elysée Palace. With Radical support, the moderate Émile Loubet replaced Faure. President Loubet, a man of few ideals, did have courage. During a visit to the elegant racetrack at Auteuil, a nationalist dandy brought his cane down on Loubet's head. Though his top hat was mashed, the president announced with great aplomb that the "Republic is more difficult to rumple." More importantly, René Waldeck-Rousseau became prime minister in June 1899. One of France's most prominent lawyers, Waldeck-Rousseau was no more an idealist than Loubet; in 1894, he had prudently turned down the opportunity to defend Dreyfus. But Waldeck-Rousseau, recognizing the dangers that the anti-Dreyfusard forces posed for the Republic, was determined to bring them to heel.

As a result, the Dreyfusards had good reason to be optimistic when, in June 1899, the Court of Appeals voided Dreyfus's 1894 sentence and scheduled a new trial for August in Rennes. Overnight, the Breton city was transformed from a dull provincial city to the stage for a political drama watched by the world. While Dreyfus, back from Devil's Island, prepared to see his family for the first time in five years, the right-wing nationalist movements organized massive protests. Groups like the Action Française, the Anti-Semitic League, and the League of Patriots sent trainloads of members to Rennes to protest the retrial, while the forces of republican order effectively locked down the city. On September 9, 1899, after several weeks of hearings, the court-martial delivered its verdict to a gaunt and malarial Dreyfus. By a 5-to-2 vote, once again, they found Dreyfus guilty. The army simply would not admit its error.

Ten days later, after complex political negotiations, President Loubet pardoned Dreyfus on September 19, 1899. Exhausted and in poor health, Dreyfus ignored the advice of supporters like Clemenceau and accepted the pardon. Many of his supporters urged Dreyfus to reject a pardon that implied guilt and to remain imprisoned and fight on for full exoneration. They cared more about the abstract causes Dreyfus represented than about the man himself. As one Dreyfusard, prominent intellectual Charles Péguy, recalled with unjustified bitterness, "We were ready to die for Dreyfus, but Dreyfus wasn't." Soon afterward, Waldeck-Rousseau declared to the Chamber of Deputies that the "Dreyfus Affair is over." In a narrow sense, the prime minister was right: The affair no longer threatened to break France in half. His government had arrested anti-Semitic agitators and dismissed those officers involved in Dreyfus's wrongful conviction. Dreyfus returned to his long-suffering family, and the press turned to other stories.

THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

In addition to providing an arena for the new right-wing nationalism, rising populist and racist anti-Semitism, and the popular press, the Dreyfus Affair also served as a crucible for the birth of the intellectuals. It is uncertain who first coined the term, which, moreover, was not always a badge of honor. Anti-Dreyfusards like Berres used "intellectual" as a term of scorn. Yet Berres himself, a prominent novelist, journalist, and politician, qualified as an intellectual. Like those he lambasted, Berres held a position of "power and authority in the political and cultural establishment, and thus defined norms and values for the rest of society." In French political and cultural discourse, anyone could exercise intellectual activity but not everyone could be an intellectual.15

When Zola published "J'accuse!", he did so less as France's preeminent novelist than as an agent of justice and truth. This applied equally to the dozens of writers, artists, and professors who also, later in 1898, signed a public declaration, titled "Manifeste of the Intellectuals," that called for reopening Dreyfus's trial. In fact, both texts reveal one of the critical traits of the French intellectual: the same preoccupation with the principles of truth and justice. They portrayed Clemenceau and his ilk as the guardians of abstract values that transcended the nation. Yet intellectuals were also entwined with the particular history of France—a history that began in 1789. Intellectuals in France offered "not merely assistance to the cause of justice or support for the defenders of the Republic but a vision of society, of the ways in which the inadequate present might be rendered into a better future."16

Inevitably, intellectuals on the Left took divergent approaches. Sociologist Émile Durkheim, for example, based his political and ethical claims, and thus his standing as an intellectual, on ostensibly scientific grounds. In works like Suicide (1897) and The Rules of Sociological Method (1895), Durkheim proposed a science of society that would reveal a shared code of ethics upon which government could base its social policies. He introduced the concept of "collective conscience" in his effort to depict the ways in which societies develop beliefs and values. This concept also served as foil to another modern phenomenon that Durkheim proposed, anomie. The rhythm of contemporary life, Durkheim argued, loosened the group bonds that previously defined our lives, leaving many people uprooted and alienated.

Romantic rather than rationalist, though equally committed to the Republic and the Dreyfusard cause, was Charles Péguy. A brilliant student at the Sorbonne, Péguy's attachment to the Republic was emotional, nearly mystical. In early works like his biography of Joan of Arc, Jeanne d'Arc (1897), Péguy wrote lyrically about the medieval saint, portraying her as the embodiment not of Christian faith, but of the French people. With the advent of the Dreyfus Affair, Péguy threw himself into
the fray. Although Péguy felt driven by the same patriotism that fueled the anti-Dreyfusards, Péguy argued that the army, far from damaging itself by reconsidering the case, had to be above all suspicion and, as a result, had to admit its errors. In the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, Péguy founded a journal, the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, whose influence reached far beyond its few hundred subscribers. In the journal’s pages, Péguy gave voice to a nearly visceral form of socialism that was far closer to Jaurès than Guesde. In fact, for Péguy, Guesde was to socialism what the Jesuits were to Christianity: an arid and stifling interpretation of a rich and liberating philosophy. Péguy applied the same parallelism to the ethos of the Opportunists Republic: the only difference between secular and Catholic dogmatism was a cloud of incense. In each case, imagination and instinct fell victim to logic and bureaucratic routine— or, as Péguy’s famous phrase, mystique was overtaken by politique.

Not all intellectuals came from the Left. Barrère, one of the most notable intellectuals on the Right, like Péguy on the Left, developed a notion of nation based on affective and emotional rather than rational claims. Barrère’s novel *Les Déracinés (The Uprooted)*, published in 1897, portrays a group of provincial youths who have come to Paris for their education. They all fall under the spell of the Paul Bouteiller, a professor of Kantian ethics. Bouteiller serves as the emblematic figure of all that is rotten in the Republic. Under his influence, these young men, "uprooted" from their customs and communities, become drifters among abstract values, victims of the Republic’s positivist education. In the novel, Bouteiller is likened to a "drill sergeant pounding into his recruits the rules handed down from above." Inevitably— for those who, like Barrère, decried the decline of tradition and community and rise of rationalism and individualism— nearly all the students come to a bad end.

While Barrère couched his ideology in fiction (as well as thousands of editorials), another leading right-wing intellectual, Charles Maurras, presented his thought in a fast and odd Cartesian reasoning. In the pages of his paper *Action française*, launched in 1908 and hawked by thuggish vendors recruited among university students known as the “king’s camels” (camelots du roi), Maurras offered a systematic demonology of the Republic and its values. To Maurras’s mind the Republic, sordid spawn of the French Revolution, violated the very essence of the French nation. The Republic’s embrace of reason and equality represented a disastrous detour off France’s true path of faith and hierarchy— a path defined by the Catholic Church and French monarchy. Maurras labeled the agents of this decay the so-called anti-Français—Protestants, Jews, and Freemasons guilty of undermining the foundations of the “true” France. The cure, the deaf and aloof Maurras argued, was loud and gritty: street battles and menacing marches against left-wing organizations or competing right-wing ones, led by his youthful “camelots.” Although the *Action française* movement attracted relatively few members prior to 1914, its paper attracted many readers who were not members: the *Action française*’s unrelenting critique of the bourgeois Republic made sense even to some people on the Left, where a group of disaffected theorists, including Georges Sorel, incorporated some of its elements into their thought.

Nearly as well known among contemporaries as Maurras and Barrès was the anti-Semitic novelist and journalist Sibylle-Gabrielle Marie-Antoinette de Rieux de Mirabeau, known by her pen name Gyp. The daughter of a ruined Legitimist family, Gyp wrote countless articles and more than a hundred novels, most of which the popular press serialized. In fact, Gyp perfected the “anti-Semitic novel”—a literary genre that built on and in turn amplified right-wing nationalism in fin-de-siècle France. Drumont published several of Gyp’s novels in *La Libre Parole*, effectively erasing the already blurred line between Drumont’s incendiary journalism and Gyp’s serialized novels, both replete with repulsive Jewish caricatures.

In important ways, Gyp embodied the era’s contradictory tensions. On the one hand, she detested many aspects of modernity, condemning cars, electricity, and other symptoms of what she called the “age of fake.” On the other hand, Gyp’s embrace of anti-Semitism, Boulangerism, and integral nationalism all placed her in the forefront of modernity. In her life as author and journalist, Gyp embodied the era’s new woman, a character type also prominent in her novels. Yet it was an odd brand of what might be considered femininity. Her novels featured unconventional heroines, defined as much by their admirable independence as by their appalling attitude toward Jews and the Republic. In an age when women neither voted nor held political office, Gyp pursued a different path of political engagement, attaching her life and work to the aspirations of the anti-democratic forces on the Right. Ironically, Gyp’s work supported an ideology and political movement that fiercely opposed women’s freedom to choose Gyp’s lifestyle.

As with Drumont’s writings, a crude form of populism and identification with economically oppressed classes informed Gyp’s anti-Semitism. However, Gyp’s answer to the misery of the working poor was not to advocate laws establishing a more equitable society but to propose emptying society of Jews, considered as agents of economic disparity, social dislocation, and intellectual disenchantment. The hero of her novel *Israël*, published in 1898 at the height of the Dreyfus Affair, warns, “When the parliamentary Republic cedes to a dictatorship, or to an empire, or to any other type of authoritarian regime, the liquidation…is going to be rather painful.”

**STATE AND CHURCH GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS**

The Dreyfus Affair was largely an urban, particularly a Parisian, matter. Regional newspapers during the Affair reveal a provincial and rural France less preoccupied by the issues and personalities surrounding Dreyfus. And yet the Affair had a deep and lasting impact on the direction of national politics. By the time Dreyfus accepted the presidential pardon in 1899, Dreyfusard idealism and innocence had grown way to republican coalition-building and pragmatism.

One key result of the Dreyfus Affair was the end of Opportunism dominance, as Radical Republicans assumed leadership of the Third Republic. Radical Prime Minister Waldeck-Rousseau described himself as "a republican moderate, but not moderately republican." Waldeck-Rousseau’s inspired blurring of categories also informed the creation of his government; for the first time ever, a socialist, Alexandre Millerand, was named to a cabinet position. The recent realignment of the socialists had anticiated this move. Prodled by Jaurès, the socialists, unlike
the Confédération Générale du Travail, or CGT, concluded that the dangers posed to the Republic by the anti-Dreyfusards eclipsed the issue of class struggle and increasingly chose to participate in the political process. Yet Waldeck-Rousseau also appealed to the republican Right, including in his cabinet General Gallifet, the republican officer who had overseen the repression of the Commune.

Waldeck-Rousseau's ministry emerged strengthened from the struggle over Dreyfus. Extreme elements on the nationalist Right found themselves, temporarily at least, isolated. Fringe figures like Jules Guérin, the leader of the Anti-Semitic League, and Paul Déroulède, who led a failed coup attempt, were either in prison or exile. Yet the right-wing revolutionary nationalism of Barrès and Maurras had not been defeated—on the contrary, it entered the political mainstream when nationalists swept to victory in the Paris municipal elections of 1898. Although many conservatives repudiated Maurras's continuing endorsement of street violence, they covertly sympathized with his hatred of democracy, Jews, and foreigners.

The conflicting currents of nationalism were less violent in the provinces, where the culture of Radical republicanism flourished. The Republic had successfully cast itself as the defender of private property, individual rights, and small business. By the turn of the century, the Radicals on the republican Left also became increasingly strident about the issue of secularism. Leading Radicals like Waldeck-Rousseau and Ferdinand Buisson had both sincere and pragmatic motives. Despite the Ralliement's tentative efforts to find a common ground, the Catholic Church remained uneasy with the Republic. After all, the Church had opposed reopening the Dreyfus case, supported the army, and was closely linked to nationalists and anti-Semitic forces. The division between Church and Republic had deep roots. An ancient institution like the Catholic Church, based on hierarchy and faith, could scarcely embrace a society informed by the revolutionary principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. If the Left viewed the Dreyfus Affair as a Catholic conspiracy against the Republic and its values because the Church had supported the wrong side, the Church again could be portrayed as a threat. Radicals were also eager to portray the Church as a clear and present danger to the Republic because galvanizing the forces of republicanism against the Church not only neutralized a traditional foe but could also distract the working class, if only for a time, from bread-and-butter issues. Much as they relished a fight against the Right, Radicals were mostly reluctant to tackle and improve the grim economic realities of the working class.

Camembert's cry—"Clericalism! There is the enemy!"—received a new lease on life in 1902 when Radicals, in alliance with 43 Socialists, won an electoral victory. The tenacity that the new prime minister, Emile Combes, brought to his battle against the Church reflected the rigid education he received as a seminary student. Unlike his predecessor Waldeck-Rousseau, Combes had neither the desire nor the ability to limit the tensions between the Church and State. Instead, he pursued a policy of confrontation, methodically tearing away from the Church what it had long considered its rights and duties. In 1903, the government shut down more than 80 religious congregations, leading to a massive diaspora of nuns, priests, and monks from various orders. The following year, the government banned all religious orders from teaching, forcing the closure of 12,000 schools in France and many schools in the colonies. Ironically, at the very moment that the Radicals portrayed Catholicism as a monolithic and hostile force, dissident reformists within the Church were attempting to find a following. French Catholics like theologian Alfred Loisy sought to lessen the tensions between the Church and the Republic, and in 1902 social reformer Marc Sangnier founded a movement, the Sillon, committed to aiding the working class. These groups nevertheless found themselves on the defensive as much with their own Church as with republicans on the Left. The Catholic Church responded to the French Republic's mounting anti-clericalism with a campaign of its own, and in 1910 a new combative pope, Pius X, banned Sangnier's Sillon movement.

At the climax of the struggle, the Republic passed the law of December 9, 1905, formally separating Church and State. The event was both more and less significant than it first appeared. On the one hand, it marked the end of a relationship with its roots in the Old Regime, severely tested by the rigors of the Revolution and restored to an uneasy truce by Napoleon's Concordat. Since that 1804 agreement, the French government had in effect supported the Catholic Church, paying its clergy and funding its schools, hospitals, and charities. The 1905 law put an end to all that. For many republicans, the divorce seemed to herald the end of one era and the beginning of a new and happier one. Yet such optimism about the end of bitter partisan divisions overlooked the many other social and economic tensions that remained unaddressed. By the same token, many Catholics harbored fears that the 1905 law would lead to the decline and even death of the Church, fears that proved unfounded. Of course, the Church was sorely tried in the immediate wake of the separation. In essence privatized, the Church initially foundered, suffering from the loss of state funds and hemorrhaging the ranks of men entering the priesthood. However, the separation eventually benefited the Church in unforeseen ways. Not only did the number of seminarians gradually rebound, so too did their quality, commitment, and energy. At the same time, the 1905 law shifted the survival of the Church to the shoulders of the faithful, not the taxpayer. Last but not least, Catholics overseas fearful of discrimination redefined their goals to coincide more closely with the republican colonial project, thereby ending the quarrels that had divided missionaries and administrators throughout the empire.

While the Radical-led governments were waging their final assault on the Church, a quieter but equally momentous realignment was taking place within the ranks of France's fractious and divided socialist camp. The Dreyfus Affair was the great impetus needed for the two rival leaders, the Marxist Jules Guesde and the reformist Jean Jaurès, to set aside their differences and to merge into a single unified party—although it was Jaurès's expansive humanism rather than Guesde's dry intellectualism that won over the rank and file. As noted in Chapter 4, this party took the name Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). Jaurès had been re-elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1902 in the general mobilization of the Left.
reforms, but neither at the pace nor on the scale that workers, socialists, or feminists desired.

NEW CRISSES

In 1905, the Combes government fell when the socialists withdrew their support. Veteran Radical republican Georges Clemenceau (1860–1909) and independent socialist Aristide Briand (1898–1910) led the major governments that followed. The 64-year-old Clemenceau came to power in a crisis atmosphere. As the Dreyfus Affair finally petered out, hundreds of workers began flocking into the national trade union federation, or CGT, founded in 1895. The CGT’s further exacerbated fears of social revolution by calling for a general strike in favor of the eight-hour workday on May 1, 1906. A horrific mining disaster at Courrières on March 10, 1906, where a gas explosion killed over a thousand miners, caused many miners to begin the strike early. First miners in the north, then workers across the country demonstrated in angry solidarity with those who had died. While the strikes did not produce the general insurrection some union leaders hoped for; they launched a pattern of strike actions by teachers, postmen, miners, metal workers, and construction workers that would be sustained up until the outbreak of World War I—despite repeated government repression.

And not only urban workers struck. The year 1907 saw protests by France’s southern wine growers in the lower Languedoc, suffering from a crisis of overproduction. In the 1890s phylloxera, a microscopic insect that feeds on grapevine roots and leaves, had decimated France’s vineyards, by the early 1900s most wine-growing peasants had replanted with phylloxera-resistant American vines and were flooding the market with cheap wine. With their livelihood threatened by declining prices, wine growers sought protection against competition and fraud, as many as a half million supporters mobilized to pressure the government, threatening to withhold their taxes until they got help. Their willingness to protest was another sign that an older way of life was beginning to disappear in parts of rural France as a result of new market forces. From peasants working only for themselves, the men and women of the Languedoc had become modern “farmers” producing crops for sale, working larger farms, substituting machinery for labor, and organizing to defend their interests.

Confronted with this upsurge of working-class and agrarian militancy, Clemenceau mobilized the powers of the state. Already known as the Tiger (he deemed the name a compliment), he now earned a second nickname: “top cop of France.” Clemenceau never hesitated to use the army and the police to put down strikers and protesters by force. The man who alternated in power with Clemenceau, Briand, although he started his political career as a socialist, followed the same policy; both men believed in maintaining the authority of the French state at all costs.

The subsequent rift that split the republican camp might have healed if Clemenceau and Briand had combined repression with even minimal reforms at a
time of a widening gap between rich and poor. By the turn of the century, the so-called second industrial revolution was underway, created by the expansion of new, advanced sectors of the French economy, including chemical, electrical, and automobile manufacturers concentrated around Paris, Lyon, and Grenoble and the steel regions of Lorraine. After years of recession in the 1890s, the French economy recovered after 1900 and began a period of vigorous growth. Debate still continues over the role of government policy, particularly protectionist tariffs, in this recovery. At the end of the nineteenth century, in response to the recession, Jules Mirel, who served variously as prime minister and—arguably a more important position for a rural nation—minister of agriculture, orchestrated punishing import tariffs. The walls of protectionism may have contributed to the recovery after 1900, allowing France to cultivate a diversified economy of small businesses and to remain largely self-sufficient, although protective tariffs also meant higher prices on goods working people had to purchase.

On the other hand, France's recovery may well have happened despite Mirel's tariffs. The French revival occurred in the context of a revitalized global economy. At the time, some critics argued that France's recovery would have been even more rapid and enduring had its economy not been fettered by self-defeating tariffs. Protectionist measures only propped up decaying and uncompetitive producers that would otherwise have disappeared in the free play of market forces. The debate about the efficacy of protective tariffs hinged largely on the kind of society preferred by the two camps. For defenders of la douce France (traditional France), the tariffs were a good and great thing; for advocates of a modern competitive France, the tariffs were a millstone fatally handicapping the country.

But only the very rich profited from the economic growth at the turn of the century. Meanwhile, for most workers, the rising cost of living, in part owing to high tariffs, outpaced their wages. France also lagged desperately behind Britain and Germany in passing basic social legislation, such as restrictions on work hours, measures to improve safety, and disability and unemployment insurance. It was this long-simmering anger about rising inequality and lack of safety protections that triggered the strikes in the first place. Clemenceau himself well understood the need for reform alongside repression, but he was hamstrung by a conservative Senate's hostility to new taxes to fund social measures. As a result, the years between 1906 and 1910 saw only limited social redress. In 1900 a 10-hour workday had been passed and in 1905 compulsory military service had been cut from three years to two, a move taken more out of a desire to punish the army for Dreyfus than to improve the lot of workers; in 1906 workers were given a compulsory day of rest; in 1907 a married women's earnings law gave working wives control over their own wages, by law previously controlled entirely by their husbands; and in 1910 old-age pensions were created for workers and peasants (cynically called "pensions of the dead") by trade unionists because they kicked in at age 65, which was above the life expectancy of most citizens.

Between 1911 and 1914, when conservative republicans and Radicals again alternated in power, the only social measure passed was aid to large families and maternity leaves. Private industrialists in Nord and Paris basin had experimented with something called family allowances. This was a sum of money added to the paycheck of the father for each child born in wedlock. While the Catholic business owners who instituted these allowances hoped to reverse declining birth rates, the allowances allowed them to avoid across-the-board wage increases by differentiating the salaries of workers to enable those with children to get by. The allowances were also meant to encourage working mothers to stay in the labor force, where they (along with the influx of over a million new foreign workers between 1896 and 1911) supplemented France's labor shortfall. Working fathers (the allowances were at first paid to the father) could only get the allowance at the end of the month if neither husband nor wife (nor working child) had missed a day of work; thus the allowances also were a tool of labor discipline. The government, increasingly anxious about population trends, viewed family allowances as a possible way to reverse dénatalité, the term that referred to France's declining birth rates. Gingerly, the republican leadership began to adopt and expand those allowances. Although the Radicals attempted repeatedly to pass a progressive income tax as well in these years, it was invariably defeated.

**NEWS OF CYCLES, CYCLES OF NEWS**

Tensions between the bourgeoisie and working class were also reflected in popular culture and sporting activity, and nowhere more so than in the rage for cycling. With the introduction of mass-production techniques, prices fell, and the bicycle, formerly the pastime of the well-to-do, was within the reach of most white-collar and factory workers by 1900. Tellingly, as early as 1893, one bicycle manufacturer unveiled a new inexpensive line, the démocratique model, aimed at a blue-collar clientele.

The democratization of the bicycle was a cause both for celebration and anxiety. As the bicycle's price plummeted and its dependability grew, distances between places shrank and the pace of life sped up. Not only were workers liberated by the advent of the bicycle, but so, too, were women. The blurring of traditional social and gender categories caused a great deal of debate over the benefits of cycling. One (male) expert warned that women who cycled were prone to "nymphomania and characterized hysteria," while others bemoaned the loss of feminine modesty. Needless to say, the source of despair for traditionalists was cause for joy for progressives: One feminist leader, Maria Pognon, praised the "egalitarian and leveling bicycle" that would help liberate her sex.

The bicycle also intersected with another trend of the era, the invention of the mass press at the turn of the century. The continuing explosion of newspapers was ignited by the rise of mass literacy, improvements in printing technology, and, no less important, the creation of leisure time. Not only did sports fill this vacuum, so too did newspapers reporting on sports. Similar to our own age of endless news cycles, where the media often generates the "events" it then covers, so too did they in turn-of-the-century France. The cycling press spawned dozens of races that
were then followed by their own reporters. It was only a matter of time before one of these dailies, L’Auto, hatched the stunning idea of a bicycle race across the width and breadth of France.

In 1903, the Tour de France bicycle race debuted, stretching over more than two weeks and nearly 2,400 kilometers. The press relished the race’s extreme demands and suffering of its contestants; journalists idolized one another in their descriptions of the cyclists’ “ruvaged” and “gaut” faces. At the same time, cyclists were depicted as machines, mere extensions of their bicycles and of the factories where many of them had once worked. With legs that pumped like pistons, cyclists became known as “pedal workers,” even “convict workers of the road” (les forçats de la route). Not surprisingly, the event’s organizers long denied cyclists the right to unionize. More astonishingly, the organizers also first resisted the introduction of gears, arguing that such technology would cheapen the cyclist’s achievement. It would make cycling easier—another way of saying it would lessen the pain. Despite the endless repetition and stamina required to complete the race, the rewards were enormous. The Tour promised not just fame, but money, a prize of nearly 20,000 francs, a staggering sum given that the average worker’s salary was just 5 francs a day. As a result, the finish line marked the divide between working-class woes and middle-class comfort.

But the race also unified. Cycling through various provinces of France expressed the notion of French identity as both national and regional, and the race even reached out to a region no longer part of the nation. Between 1906 and 1910, L’Auto persuaded the German authorities to allow the Tour de France to pass through Alsace-Lorraine. Though the event was billed as apolitical—“sport has no fatherland,” trumpeted L’Auto—the emotional significance of the event was obvious. The newspaper boasted that its posters in Alsace were the first to be published exclusively in French since 1870, and “La Marseillaise” was actually heard as racers sped along Alsatian roads.28 Franco-German cooperation around a sporting event would nevertheless prove short-lived. In 1911 the Alsatian leg of the Tour de France was canceled, a sign that long simmering tensions among all the Great Powers were reaching a hazardous tipping point.

A DANGEROUS DIPLOMACY

The decade before World War I witnessed growing strains between France and Germany over both continental and colonial issues. To understand these strains, it is necessary to return briefly to the evolution of French and German diplomacy after the early years of the Third Republic. Ever since its defeat in 1870, France had sought revenge for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and a return to Great Power status, in part by expanding its overseas empire. Yet given Germany’s far greater military, economic, and demographic resources, French diplomats were adamant that their nation should never again face Germany alone. This determination led France and Germany together into a complex set of competing alliances that increasingly divided Europe into two armed camps. Should any one of the Great Powers be attacked, a war involving all of them would inevitably follow.

After German unification, the kaiser’s diplomats had cultivated their “natural” ally, the Austro-Hungarian Empire; by 1882 Italy had joined Germany and Austria-Hungary to form the Triple Alliance. In response, republican France felt it had no choice but to attempt to woo its own allies to “contain” Germany, starting with Russia. In 1892, the most democratic regime on the continent signed a treaty of friendship with its most autocratic rulers, Tsar Alexander III. The French government commemorated the alliance with great pomp by naming a new, extraviately ornate Paris bridge after Tsar Alexander III; his son and successor, Tsar Nicholas II, made a state visit to France in 1896 to lay its foundation stone. In his moving autobiographical novel based on his French grandmother’s account of this episode, Russian writer Andrei Makine puzzles over this instance of Realpolitik. Learning that “La Marseillaise” was played at the ceremony, the young protagonist wonders: “And the tsar? Did he know what the song was about?”29

Germany, watching its fears of encirclement by hostile powers become real, retaliated by embarking on an all-out arms race, competing not only with France by land but also with Britain by sea and by becoming more aggressively expansionist overseas. By the turn of the century Germany’s growing military prowess and colonial ambitions prodded the French and British governments—six years after Fashoda—to receive enough of their outstanding colonial disputes to sign an agreement, the Entente Cordiale in 1904. France finally recognized the British Protectorate in Egypt (but forced the British to leave Egypt’s archaeological services, which dated back to Napoleon’s invasion of 1798–1801, in French hands), in exchange for British support of France in Morocco. Britain and Russia also moved closer after Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, so that by 1907 a “Triple Entente” of France, Britain, and Russia confronted the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

The Triple Entente left no doubts that should war break out, France, Russia, and Britain could outman, outspend, and outproduce Germany and its weaker allies of Austria-Hungary and Italy. A frightened German General Staff had every incentive to believe that only a swift victory against France—which could mobilize more quickly than Russia—would preempt eventual defeat and redress the balance of power in Germany’s favor. The Germans knew they could not fight a simultaneous two-front war, both in the west and the east, and win. In 1906, General Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the German General Staff and a keen student of military history, thus hatched a plan for knocking out France first should war break out with Russia. Schlieffen argued that the German army’s right flank should make an immediate sweep through neutral Belgium and Luxembourg, bypassing French defenses and allowing German forces to march south, surround Paris, and envelop French armies from the west.29 Caught from behind, as in 1870, individual French armies could be crushed before Russia completed its mobilization, which Schlieffen calculated would take six weeks. As he lay dying in 1913, Schlieffen’s alleged last words were: “Strengthen the right flank! Strengthen the right flank!”—fatal words upon which Germany’s entire war strategy rested.30

By the time Schlieffen completed his plan in 1906, war among the Great Powers in Europe seemed increasingly likely. A year earlier another colonial dispute had
thwarted to escalate, this time between France and Germany in Morocco, still a sovereign nation. France sought to extend its "traditional" influence over the North African state, while Kaiser Wilhelm II was determined to block any such expansion of French power. While the situation was defused in 1906, an international crisis erupted again on July 1, 1911, when Germany went so far as to send a gunboat to the Moroccan port of Agadir. France and Germany, however, managed once again—for a tense six-month diplomatic standoff—to strike a deal. In return for making Morocco a "protectorate," France ceded a swath of its territory in equatorial Africa to Germany. On March 30, 1912, the Sultan of Morocco—his monarchy already heavily in debt and facing rebellion from within—signed a treaty accepting the French Protectorate.

Critics on the Left, most prominently Jean Jaurès, denounced the dangers of such escalating militarism and imperialism on both humanitarian and geopolitical grounds. Jaurès' book L'Armée nouvelle (The New Army), published in 1911, warned that technological advances had made war unthinkably destructive. Yet this was precisely what the European powers risked in their continued race not just for more colonies, but also for arms, alliances, and influence in Europe itself. In a much-publicized speech given in Basel in 1912, Jaurès invoked the pealing of the city's church bells. Quoting from a poem by German poet Friedrich Schiller, Jaurès exhorted the assembled crowd of "the living to resist the monster [and] break the thunderbolts of war." Although war between France and Germany over Morocco was narrowly averted in 1912, two years later France would not be so fortunate.

**PREPARING FOR WAR**

As tensions mounted in Europe between 1912 and 1914, French statesmen and military commanders took a variety of measures of their own to prepare for war. First, in 1913, the French legislature passed a law changing obligatory military service back from two years to three. Military service had always been a defining attribute of (male) republican citizenship—a sacred duty that went along with the political rights of the citizen. Second, a consensus emerged that France could impose the same "blood tax" on their colonial subjects, even though the latter did not have the vote, as partial repayment for what they considered the benefits of France's civilizing mission. In 1910, General Mangin—who had made his career in the colonies—had hit on the idea of creating a "Force Noire" or "Black Army" recruited among its African subjects to help make up France's demographic deficit in the case of war. In 1914, the army called for volunteers throughout the empire and soon began to conscript them by force. Over the course of the war, about 500,000 colonial soldiers, or almost 7 percent of French troops, would fight for France, many involuntarily.

A third important area of military planning was defining battlefield doctrine. The General Staff, led by General Joseph Joffre, believed that the safety of France required taking the war to the enemy. Known as the "all-out offensive," the idea was that well-trained French soldiers, imbued with patriotic fervor, could not be stopped. Joffre enshrined this doctrine in the last of the many war plans drawn up before 1914, Plan XVII, which nevertheless gave the generals considerable operational flexibility to respond to whatever move the Germans made.

Yet the army was never given the funds to provide its soldiers with the training or the leadership to implement such an offensive strategy. French soldiers spent much of their prewar military service on garrison duty, instead of learning
the discipline and organization under fire necessary to sustain an offensive in the age of the machine gun. The same inferiority affected materiel, although it should be kept in mind that Germany was preparing for two attacks (France and then Russia) compared to only one by France. The French had 2,500 machine guns in August 1914 compared to the Germans' 4,500; 3,800 75mm artillery pieces compared to the Germans' 6,000 77mm guns; and practically no heavy artillery. Perhaps the only place the army did not skimp was on the soldiers' dazzling red and blue uniforms, inherited from the nineteenth century. France's white-gloved commanders found red trousers to be more distinguished and patriotic than the khaki favored by the British. France, then, was both overconfident and underprepared in 1914. Although its army and navy were still widely feared in Europe, no one foresaw the kind of conflict they would have to fight.

The fragile peace in Europe finally came to an end in the summer of 1914, for reasons far beyond French control; the catalyst was not in fact competing imperialist claims overseas but long-simmering tensions in the Balkans. On June 28, a Serbian-backed Bosnian nationalist assassinated the heir to the Habsburg throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo. A month later, on July 28, Austria, backed by its ally Germany, declared war on Serbia. On July 30–31, Austria mobilized, but so too did Russia despite French urgings to wait. As Serbia's ally, Russia was protecting its credibility in the Balkans, but it hoped that its mobilization against Austria would not lead Germany to reciprocate. The Triple Alliance made that option impossible—but in order to fight Russia, Germany had to activate the Schlieffen Plan and invade neutral Belgium and defeat France in the six-week window envisaged by Schlieffen before Russia could complete mobilization.

On July 31, Germany sent a final message to France, asking whether it would stay neutral in case of war between Germany and Russia. Here, the past dominated the present. France had spent the previous 34 years seeking to reclaim its Great Power status and take revenge on Germany for its earlier defeat. It could hardly respond to Germany's provocation by abandoning Russia, to whom it was tied by the treaty of 1892. Therefore on August 1, when Germany declared war on Russia, France began its own mobilization. On August 3, Germany formally declared war on France. Firmly convinced that they were victims of German aggression, the French people prepared to defend their national territory. The Great War that Jaurès had so feared, and warned repeatedly against, had begun.

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CHAPTER 6

The Republic at War
1914–1919

On July 31, 1914, socialist leader and ardent pacifist Jean Jaurès was shot to death in a Paris café by a fanatical French nationalist. The next day, the bells of France rang to mobilize the nation for the very war that Jaurès had so long tried to prevent but others ardently desired. In Paris, the long silent bells of Notre Dame and other old churches suddenly transformed the city into a vast "bell-ringing nation." As novelist Roger Martin du Gard wrote of August 1, 1914:

Suddenly...a deafening racket filled the space: the great bell of the church was loudly tolling a single note one after another, distinct, resonant, solemn. People, rooted to the spot, stared at each other for a moment, stupefied. Then they began to run off in all directions...in the distance, other bells swung into action...everywhere resounding to the same insistent rhythm, sinister as a death knell.

In an age when half of the French population lived in the countryside and when the radio was still used only for military purposes, when television was not yet invented and when cinema was still silent, France went to war in 1914 in the same way that it had done in centuries past. The old-fashioned sound of bells, however, had little to do with the horrors of the modern, mechanized war that was to come. On that fateful August day, the bells pressed both the deaths and the myths of the only successful war waged by France in the entire twentieth century.

The Great War, the name it was given by those who lived through it, which lasted from August 1914 to November 1918, deeply marked the character of modern France. Historians still do not understand all the consequences of this catastrophe and continue to debate its origins, but they agree that the subsequent history of France cannot be understood except in its bloody light. Of all the questions spawned by the war, perhaps none has remained more difficult to answer than that of how and why French soldiers and civilians were able to stay the course for over four years in the face of unimaginable suffering and cruelties. World War I on the Western Front was fought overwhelmingly on French soil. The French mobilized 8.4 million men and suffered proportionately more casualties than any other major power. And although they may