

2009

If I Were a Rich Man: The Rothschilds and Anti-Semitism in 19th Century France

Brian Kernan

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kernan, Brian (2009) "If I Were a Rich Man: The Rothschilds and Anti-Semitism in 19th Century France," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II*: Vol. 14 , Article 8.

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol14/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

If I Were a Rich Man: The Rothschilds and Anti-Semitism in 19th Century France

Brian Kernan

Introduction

Napoleon Bonaparte surrendered his imperial ambitions on the fields of Waterloo on Sunday, 18 June 1815, ushering in a period for France increasingly characterized by trans-national capitalist institutions. In the wake of France's defeat at the hands of the Seventh Coalition, the Rothschild family forged the frontiers of this new age, permanently altering the role of finance, amassing one of Europe's greatest fortunes in the process. This financial success illuminated a new chapter in France's anti-Semitic tradition. While the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Code technically ensured equal rights to France's Jews, reactions to the Jews in general and the Rothschilds in particular in the context of economic change highlighted the persistence of French anti-Semitism.

Though suspicion and hatred of the Jews in Europe, with a legacy stretching back nearly two millennia, was nothing new, the rise of the Rothschilds, combined with rapid modernization, engendered a new anti-Semitism among French intellectuals that combined traditional anti-Semitic fears with the anxieties of class struggle, nationalism, and industrialization. Due to their unparalleled wealth and influence, the Rothschild family became a symbolic canvas upon which society's economic frustrations were splattered. In the views of the French socialists of the 1840s and

the French nationalists of the 1890s, the Rothschilds represented the dual evils of capitalism and transnationalism.

Providing a thoroughly researched foundation in Rothschild studies is Niall Fergusson's *The World's Banker*. In this impressive work, Fergusson provides a social and economic history of the Rothschild family, beginning with the family's 18th century Frankfurt origins and continuing until 1945. Fergusson cites a large number of earlier works, including *Rise of the House of Rothschild*, a seminal 1927 work written by Egon Caesar Corti that elaborates on the origins of the banking dynasty as well as the families' role in mid-19th century European politics and finance. Virginia Cowle's *The Rothschilds*, published in 1973, provides important biography on the family through letters, memoirs, and social history. Niall Fergusson's work, the most recent and expansive addition to this Rothschild discourse, also exhibits a wealth of primary sources that illustrate both the growth of the Rothschild fortune, financial strategies, and social reaction.

This topic also requires a history of France's intellectual movements. These social movements are separated into three categories: French Enlightenment (1789 Revolution), French Socialism (1840s), and French Nationalism (1890s). Roger Price's *A Concise History of France* provides a useful overview to this end. For the French Enlightenment, two works provide backbone. The first, Arthur Hertzberg's *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, is cited by Fergusson and offers perspective on France's Jewish Question as well as the effects of the 1789 Revolution on the Jews of France. The second, Adam Sutcliffe's more recent

Judaism and Enlightenment, broadens the discourse both in term of time frame and region. Adding an economic context to this discourse is Paula Hyman's *The Jews of Modern France*, which follows the economic and social development of France's Jewish community.

The social discussion is enhanced here by K. Steven Vincent's *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* and Jonathan Beecher's *Charles Fourier*. These works are useful in charting the evolution of French socialism. For primary sources, the essays of Proudhon (including his posthumously published "Carne") and Karl Marx (particularly "The Jewish Question") enhance the discussion of anti-Semitism within France's socialist movement. Also utilized are newspaper articles by Fredriech Engels for "The Northern Star" and anti-Semitic pamphlets of the 1830s and 1840s. These pamphlets include 1836's "The Hebrew Talisman," as well as the works of Georges Matthius-Dairnvaell and Alphonse de Toussenel. The translated works of Drumont are also analyzed. Adding context is Michel Winock's *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and Fascism in France*. Though Winock is primarily interested in the rise of European Fascism and 20th century anti-Semitism, his work on the anti-Semites of the 1840s and 1890s is useful.

Perhaps the hardest piece is France's economic history, for which *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe, Volume VII* offers introduction. Michael Smith's recent *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France*, however, provides more useful economic history. More importantly, Smith demonstrates how the House of Rothschild shaped and was influenced by

this history. Elaborating the role of Rothschild finance specifically is Charles E. Freedman's *The Triumph of Corporate Capitalism*, which is useful for analyzing the late 19th century. Finally, the collection of essays *Enterprise and Entrepreneurs* expands on knowledge of 19th century business models. Adding social context to this economic history are the cartoons and essays of the 1840s and 1890s.

The French Enlightenment and the Jews

Prior to their emancipation, Jews in France inhabited a society in which they were deemed outsiders, sporadically deprived of their rights of residency and exposed to the whims of local and national authorities. Subjected to high tax burdens, restraints on residency and employment, and poor economic conditions, the Jews formed largely self-governing communities, or *kahal*, that were tolerated to different degrees across the kingdom. Though systemically marginalized, Jews fulfilled a crucial role in France's economic system. Jews participated at the fringes of France's mercantilist colonial economy, performing niche duties reserved for them. The bulk of the economy, including production of France's most profitable commodities, was controlled by the French Christian guilds. The niche role of Jews, however, was still critical¹

By the end of the 18th century, the Jewish population of France numbered approximately 40,000, a relatively small population compared to France's overall population of approximately 30,000,000. This Jewish population encompassed a number of far flung

¹ Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) 79.

communities relatively isolated from each other and housed at the edges of France's borders (with a tiny unauthorized population settled in Paris).² In the Age of French Enlightenment that preceded the Revolution of 1789, the social status of these 40,000 Jews became hotly contested within France's intellectual circles as the status of French Jews became a significant lens through which the requirements of French citizenship were defined. In these discussions, anti-Semitism played a prominent role in the works of even the most forward thinking enlightenment thinkers. Voltaire in his "Sermon" wrote of the Jews:

Your enemies today add to your criminal account that you stole from the Egyptian... that you have been infamous usurers, that you too have burnt people at the stake, and that you have been found guilty of cannibalism... I admit that we too have been a barbarous, superstitious, ignorant, and stupid people, but would it be just to proceed to burn the pope and all the monsignori of Rome at the stake, because the first Romans kidnapped the Sabines and despoiled the Samnites?³

Though outwardly extending an olive branch to the Jewish community, Voltaire's statement held Jews responsible for horrendous abominations. Voltaire more explicitly revealed his feelings towards the Jews in a 1772 essay entitled "One Must Take Sides": "You have surpassed all nations in impertinent fables, in bad conduct and in barbarism. You deserve to be

² Hyman, 1.

³ Hertzberg, 280.

punished, for this is your destiny.”⁴

For Enlightenment thinkers, transforming Jews into French citizens posed a social dilemma because Jews were intrinsically different from French Christians. At the heart of this was “the Jewish Question,” the struggle of Enlightenment thinkers to reconcile Jews with their egalitarian ideals. The intellectual leadership of the Enlightenment strongly believed that Jewish identity and French identity were incompatible, and therefore French citizenship first a rejection of Jewishness. While equality formed a cornerstone of the Enlightenment, equality for the Jew first required reform and regeneration. Between 1789 and 1791, the National Assembly’s most passionate supporters of Jewish emancipation reassured their fellow revolutionaries that Jews could be transformed into honest Frenchmen. Following this reasoning, Count Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre declared during a debate on 23 December 1789: “To the Jews as a nation, nothing; to the Jews as individuals, everything. They must renounce their judges; they must have none but ours... They must not form a political corps or an Order in the state, they must be citizens individually.”⁵

In June 1791, equal rights were extended to the Jews of Avignon, which included the wealthy Jewish communities of Bourdeaux. However, in Alsace-Lorraine, anxieties over the general indebtedness of Frenchmen to Jews in that province meant that civic equality was not granted until September 1791. The National Assemblies’ decision to grant full citizenship

⁴ Arthur Hertzberg, “Voltaire and the Jews,” *New York Times* September 30, 1990.

⁵ Hyman, 9.

to French Jews was coupled with the requirement that emancipated Jews swear a civic oath in which Jewish individuals renounced their Jewish identity and swore allegiance to the French State. Expectations that emancipated Jews would dissolve into the French majority, however, did not occur despite explicit attempts in Alsace-Lorraine. There, Jews continued to form a distinct community, even after a ban on beards and sidelocks was put in place.⁶ Though legally emancipated, anti-Semitism continued in France under a new guise. As Arthur Hertzberg notes, the French Enlightenment “changed the bias towards the Jews from a religious base to a secular base.”⁷

The emancipation of Jews in France was coupled with the liberalization of the French economy. The French Revolution obliterated the traditional aristocratic value system that had previously regulated France’s privilege-based financial sector. Traditionally, France’s aristocratic elite, which classified business as a second-class activity, had restricted French enterprise through a regressive tax system that effectively punished entrepreneurial endeavors.⁸ Between 1789 and 1791, this system of privilege was dismantled. This culminated in the Allard Law of 1791, which legally ended France’s guild system.⁹ The eradication of this system, under which guilds had controlled the nation’s most lucrative industries, allowed Jews to

⁶ Hertzberg, 33.

⁷ Arnold Ages, “Book Review; French Enlightenment and the Jews,” *The Modern Language Journal* 53.5 (1969): 358.

⁸ Michael Smith, *The Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France, 1800-1930* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 23.

⁹ Smith, 24.

enter previously forbidden markets. These events served to jumpstart capitalist enterprise in France, even as revolutionary violence wreaked havoc on the nation's economy.

Financial Revolution in Post-Napoleonic France

Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat on the fields of Waterloo in 1815 changed France's financial landscape. The Seventh Coalition restored the Bourbon King Louis XVIII to power, under whose supervision France enjoyed a period of relative peace that lasted from 1815 until 1848. The First Treaty of Paris, which restored a Bourbon Monarchy faced with no wartime reparations from the Sixth Coalition, France's former enemies, was replaced with a revised Treaty of Paris of the Seventh Coalition. This Treaty of Paris, signed in November 1815, leveled heavy reparations on France. Beginning in March 1816 and continuing over the next five years, 700 million francs were to be paid to members of the Seventh Coalition, mainly Great Britain. The primary purpose of these reparations was to pay for the 150,000 soldiers left to occupy France over that period.¹⁰

The period directly following Napoleon's defeat was characterized by an influx of successful Protestants and Jews, mainly from Germany and Switzerland, into France's financial sector. The Rothschilds, originally coming to France in 1811 in order to benefit from the economic distortions of the Napoleonic War, had helped pioneer the way. Initial resistance to these groups by France's conservative Catholic majority only served to unite them into more cohesive and effective

¹⁰ Fergusson, 121

units, against which less organized Catholic bankers found it difficult to compete.¹¹ According to historian David Landes, “French entrepreneurship was set by family firms, owned and managed by blood relations, whose primary concerns were safety, continuity, and privacy.” This model, recognized under Napoleon’s *Code de Commerce* of 1807 as a single partnership company, characterized the operations of the Rothschilds as well as other Jewish and Protestant firms.¹² In the words of Bertrand Gille, these post-Napoleonic changes in French finances served “to pass [French finances] from a primitive structure to one that approached [modern] banking.”¹³

In 1815, James Rothschild’s Paris branch controlled just one-sixth of all Rothschild capital (approximately £36 million). By 1820, he was the richest merchant banker in Paris, and by 1821, his financial branch in Paris had become the most powerful within the Rothschild’s expanding financial empire.¹⁴ In 1825, James’ share of the Rothschild’s assets was £1,490 million, or one-third of total Rothschild assets.¹⁵ This asset expansion was coupled with an expansion of operations outside of France. Between 1815 and 1848, James Rothschild’s firm became increasingly international, beginning with the financing of American cotton

¹¹ Smith, 53.

¹² Edward Carter, Forster Robert and Moody Joseph Nestor, *Enterprise and entrepreneurs in nineteenth-and twentieth-century France*, (Baltimore :Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976): 42.

¹³ Smith, 34

¹⁴ Lottman, Herbert, *Return of the Rothschilds*, (New York: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 1995): 15.

¹⁵ Smith, 34

imports in the 1830s. By the 1840s, the branch imported a variety of goods for the French market, including tallow, lard, sugar, and Russian grain. The French Rothschilds also held importation rights to the copper of Russia's Demidoff family. Becoming increasingly involved with metals during the 1840s led the Rothschilds to become the exclusive sales agents of Europe's only mercury mines in Almaden, Spain and Idria, Dalmatia.¹⁶

According to Niall Fergusson, the operations of James Rothschild also extended, and benefited from, "a network of financial relationships with key public figures in Restoration Europe."¹⁷ However, while a growing anti-Rothschild sentiment in France attributed Rothschild success after 1815 to a "web of corruption" reliant on bribery and exploitation, Fergusson concludes that it was the scale and sophistication of Rothschild operations that led James Rothschild to become a dominating figure in French finance. Fergusson notes that "James came to exercise a near monopoly over French government finance, issuing seven loans with a nominal capital of 1.5 billion francs (£60 million) between 1823 and 1847."¹⁸

Reaction to the House of Rothschild

In 1830, Louis-Philippe was crowned as King of the French, popularly known as the July Monarch. In the first months of his reign, Louis-Philippe's favorable attitude towards the Jews inflamed a renewed anti-Semitism. Among the first decisions made by Louis-

¹⁶ Smith, 56

¹⁷ Fergusson, 172-173

¹⁸ Fergusson, 173

Philippe's government was the approval by the Chamber of Peers on 1 February 1831 to place the Jewish religion on the state's religious budget.¹⁹ Bernard Lazare wrote of the decision: "It was the definitive collapse of the Christian state."²⁰ Meanwhile, France's conservative Catholic factions of the period, led by Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, blamed the Jews for transforming Paris into a "Babylon of vice and decadence, criminality and incredulity, immigration, and cosmopolitanism."²¹

The perception of Louis-Philippe's pro-Jewish sentiments, coupled with the extravagant wealth of the Rothschilds and other Jewish families, caused outrage among the general populace. Fanning these flames was the unstable situation caused by rioting workers in Paris and other cities. Demanding higher wages, shorter working days, and a ban on dangerous machinery, many of these workers resented France's economic transformation. In November 1831, the temporary seizure of Lyons by armed workers was met with stiff repression of workers' organizations.²² Government repression under Louis-Philippe cemented notions of class struggle amongst workers and worked to popularize the anti-capitalist and often anti-Semitic writings of French socialists in the 1840s.

Writing in the fall of 1843, Karl Marx addressed the

¹⁹ Michel Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France*, (Stanford University Press, 2001): 135.

²⁰ Winock, 135.

²¹ Jonathon Judaken, *Jean-Paul Satre and the Jewish Question: Anti-Semitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual*, (University of Nebraska, 2009): 10-11.

²² Roger Price, *A Concise History of France*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005): 195.

Jewish Question which earlier enlightenment thinkers had grappled with. For Marx, the Jewish question did not concern allegiance to the nation-state but rather, the moral legitimacy of the Jew. Marx wrote:

The decomposition of man into Jew and citizen, Protestant and citizen, religious man and citizen, is neither a deception leveled at citizenship, nor is it circumvention of political emancipation; it is political emancipation itself, the political method of emancipating oneself from religion.²³

Calling for the emancipation from religion, Marx focused special attention on the Jewish community, asking;

What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money. Very well then! Emancipation from huckstering and money, consequently from practical, real Judaism, would be the self-emancipation of our time.²⁴

In this economic framework, it was modern devotion to wealth and not religion that formed the crux of social transformation. And if money was the religion of the Jew, then Rothschild was the Goliath standing between the oppressed worker and economic emancipation, at whose feet the rulers of Europe stood subservient.

As France's socialist discussion continued through the 1840s, the Rothschilds came to personify the

²³ Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher, 1844): 9.

²⁴ Marx, 19.

excesses of capitalism, making them natural targets. As a focal point of socialist frustrations, the French Rothschilds served as an enduring symbol of greed and exploitation. Friedrich Engels, Marx's co-author, in an 1846 article entitled "Government and Opposition in France," wrote of perceived Rothschild domination of French government:

The money lords rejoice in their strength, and guessing it will not last very long, they make the best of the present moment ... The majority of the middle class, voters of Paris, belong to the party of Thiers and O. Barrot; they want to do away with the exclusive rule of Rothschild and Co., to recover an honorable and independent position for France in her external relations ...²⁵

In this article, Engels addressed an anti-Rothschild sentiment that was growing among workers and intellectuals alike. Tying in explicit contempt towards the Rothschilds, he continued, "The hatred against Rothschild and the money lords is enormous, and a German paper says, Rothschild might take this as a warning that he had better take up his headquarters somewhere else than upon the ever-burning volcano of Paris."

The writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon offered a more conservative and French alternative to Marx's radical overthrow of social norms. Unlike Marx, Proudhon was a religious man and believed that God was essential, but that the myths of religion were what

²⁵ Friedrich Engels, *Marx/Engles Collected Works Volume 6*, "Government and Opposition in France," (The Northern Star No. 460): 61.

hindered social progress. Another critic of capitalism, Proudhon argued that the 1789 Revolution had not yet completed the task of ensuring equality. Capitalism, he believed, had accomplished only half its work. Proudhon addressed what he saw as symptoms of modernity: urbanization, secularization, and industrialization in French society. Like Marx and Engels, Proudhon was critical of the Jews. In Proudhon's economic framework the Jew was frequently referred to as the anti-producer and contrasted with the economically enslaved French worker.²⁶ Though not as explicitly anti-Semitic as other socialists of his time, Proudhon's posthumously published "Carnets" reveal an insidious hatred of the Jews and the Rothschilds. In them, he declared:

The Jew is the enemy of the human race. This race must be sent back to Asia, or exterminated. H. Heine, A. Weil, and others are simply secret spies. Rothschild, Crémieux, Marx, Fould, evil choleric, envious, bitter men ... who hate us.²⁷

In the 1845 pamphlet "Juifs roi de l'époque," Alphonse de Toussenel elaborated on the perceived distinctions between Jew and Frenchmen while calling for a call to arms against the Jews: "Power to the strong! Death to parasitism! War on the Jews! That is the motto of the new revolution!"²⁸ "Juifs roi de l'époque" would become a seminal work for future anti-Semites like Edouard Drumont.

²⁶ Winock, 92.

²⁷ (Carnets, vol. 2, p. 337: No VI, 178) "Proudhon's diaries (Carnets, ed. P. Hautmann, Marcel Rivière, Paris 1960 to date)

²⁸ Winock, 92.

The frenzy of Rothschild hatred that erupted in the 1840s led to James Rothschild being blamed when a train on France's Rothschild-owned Northern Line crashed on 8 July 1846 near the farming village of Fampoux, killing 57 people and wounding over 100. Many saw the event as yet another example of Jewish greed placing profit above the interest of the French people.²⁹ Following the event, French socialist Georges Matthius-Dairnvaell wrote a pamphlet entitled "Histoire edifiante et curieuse de Rothschild, roi des juifs" that attacked the Rothschilds for subjecting honest Frenchmen to economic feudalism. Over 60,000 copies of the anti-Semitic pamphlet were sold in 1846 alone.³⁰ Matthius-Dairnvaell, in a series of anti-Rothschild pamphlets that followed, emphasized James Rothschild's German origins in order to highlight his distinct separateness from French society. While the revolution of 1848 resounded across France, Emile Barrault wrote in a "Letter to M. Rothschild":

Shareholders, shopkeepers, manufacturers, pensioners tumble down in a mass of people, grand on petty, crushing the crushed. Alone, in the midst of so much ruin you [M. Rothschild] don't waver. Reached by the first shock in Paris, your house stands firm in Naples, Vienna, Berlin, while buffeted by a revolution advancing, meeting you in Europe. You remain upright. In short, all opulence collapses, all glory is

²⁹ *La reforme*, 14 July 1846. On train accidents in nineteenth-century France, see Francois Caron. "Le role des accidents de voyageurs dans la gestion des chemins de fer en France," *Entreprise et Histoire* 17 (1997), 85-93.

³⁰ *Cerfberr de Medelsheim, Les Juifs, leur histoire, leurs moeurs* (Paris, 1847): preface.

humbled, all domination is cast down; the Jew, *king of the epoch* retains his throne.³¹

As the 1840s came to an end, the revolutionary spirit that culminated in 1848 became less vocal, and as it did so the Rothschilds received less focus. However, the accusations that the Rothschilds were the new economic kings of Europe prevailed, to resurface during periods of social distress or unrest.

French Nationalism and Anti-Semitism on the Eve of the Dreyfus Affair

While the 1840s witnessed the development of French socialism's economic anti-Semitic framework, the hate-spewing of these socialists did not necessarily represent the views of France's political leaders. Furthermore, the socialist economic framework attacked the Rothschilds for their wealth as much as their Judaism. In the late 19th century, France would experience a wave of anti-Semitism that was far more politically explicit. Following the dissolution of the Bourbon Monarchy and re-establishment of the Napoleonic Empire under Napoleon III in 1852, French society became increasingly nationalistic. Perhaps no event better intensified French nationalism than the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany following the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). In this period of nationalistic frustration, France received an influx of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe starting in the 1880s. These Jews were the target of a re-energized discussion of France's Jewish Question, a

³¹ Emile Barrault, *Letter to M. Rothschild* (Lettres Contemporaines, Paris, 1848).

discussion that transformed anti-Semitism in France into a political doctrine.³²

The Rothschild family was attacked with renewed vigor leading up to the 1890s. The families' critics during this time period applied new accusations on the foundations of traditional anti-Rothschildism. Leading the way in keeping anti-Semitism alive in France was August Chirac, whose 1883 book *Kings of the Republic* highlighted myths regarding Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. Again, the Rothschilds were blamed for undermining the Bonaparte Empire, but Chirac added the German heritage of the Rothschilds to the equation. Not only had France been undermined by transnational finance, Chirac argued, but worst, it had been a family of German Jews that was responsible.³³ In an age of fierce French nationalism, the combination of German and Jew juxtaposed the traditional enemy of Christianity with the modern political threat of Germany.³⁴

Édouard Adolphe Drumont, an admirer of Toussenel, became the de-facto leader of France's anti-Semitic movement in the 1890s. As founder of the Antisemitic League of France in 1889, Drumont possessed a variety of methods to spread his anti-Semitic beliefs throughout France. He argued that France had fallen under Jewish oppression as a result of Jewish emancipation. Emancipation allowed the Jews, previously confined to their ghettos, to take over the nation's financial institutions.³⁵ With the 1886

³² Hyman, 120.

³³ Fergusson, 785

³⁴ Fergusson, 786

³⁵ Winock, 91

publication of Drumont's bestseller "La France juive," the Jewish Question was re-introduced into society's mainstream discourse. In it, Drumont combined traditional anti-Semitism with new conspiratorial theories.³⁶ In 1889, Drumont wrote "La fin d'un monde" to highlight Jewish control over France's media and legal system. In this work, Drumont wrote: "They [Jews] have strengthened the points, by which they might have been taken, have silently modified laws that troubled them, or have obtained warrants that paralyze the implementation of those laws. They have made the press the servant of capital, so that it is unable to speak."³⁷

Controlling Jewish movement and participation in French society became a centerpiece of Rightist anti-Semitic doctrine. Leon Daudet, a prominent Monarchist and friend of Drumont, further elaborated on the need to control French Jews:

Kept under close surveillance by a power as clear-sighted as the monarchy, the Jews could be tolerable and almost acceptable ... To persecute Israel would be unwise and odious. But to lay down guidelines limiting Jewish activity, particularly in the political sphere, would be a good thing, and a benefit that the Jews themselves would quickly appreciate.³⁸

This new level of control included the Rothschilds in France. Beginning in 1892, Drumont found a new

³⁶ Cowles, 185

³⁷ Winock, 87

³⁸ Quoted in Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience: Anti-Semitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair*, (East Brunswick, New Jersey, 1982): 672-673.

platform to spread his ideas as editor of “La Libre Parole.” As editor, Drumont leveled attacks on Alphonse Rothschild and began a campaign to expel Jews from the French army.³⁹ In 1894, just two years later, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew, was arrested and convicted for selling French military intelligence to Germany. This event, arguably more than any other, served as a flashpoint of 19th century anti-Semitism in Europe.

Conclusions

The Rothschilds represented many things to many groups in 19th century France. To their fellow Jews, they symbolized economic emancipation from the Jewish Ghetto, with Amschel Rothschild capably pulling himself up from humble beginnings and founding one of the century’s most enduring legacies. To others, the Rothschild model pioneered the rise of international financing, effectively reforming a system that had once been reserved for the privileged few. However, to many Frenchmen, the success of the Rothschilds represented the grim menace of the wandering Jew usurping French society while profiting from the misery of the disenfranchised. Although the revolutionaries of 1789 attempted to address the Jewish Question, the inability of Frenchmen to see past Jewish difference kept this issue alive and well. Prior to Emancipation, the Jew was despised in a Christian context, with even the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment viewing the Jew through a lens of accusation. Jewish Emancipation ironically added new accusations to the long list of crimes the

³⁹ Cowles, 185

Jews were deemed responsible for.

For the socialists of the 1840s, the Rothschild family represented a bourgeois elite sucking the lifeblood out of France's workers while subjecting the people of France to an economic transformation that was destroying nearly every aspect of French society. As transnational Jews, the Rothschilds represented nothing less than a foreign invasion of France's political economy, with the Jewish Kings usurping Europe's rulers and corrupting the very Enlightenment Ideals that had granted them Emancipation to begin with. The nationalists of the 1890s added the German charge against the Rothschilds, juxtaposing the traditional enemy of Christian Europe with the modern political enemy of France. Taken altogether, 19th century attacks on the Rothschilds came to mirror those less tangible forces the attackers most feared. Alone, the Rothschilds in Europe came to symbolize opulence, so much so that the in 1902, Ukrainian author Sholem Aleichem wrote a monologue entitled *Ven ikh bin Rothschild* (If I were Rothschild, a title that inspired Fiddler on the Roof's "If I were a Rich Man."⁴⁰

Brian Kernan is a senior history and economics double major. He is particularly interested in economic history of China and Western Europe.

⁴⁰ Sholom Alechem, *Tevye's Daughters* (Sholom Aleichem Family, 1999): 16–19.