**Title:** Alfred Dreyfus’ Degradation Ceremony, January  13, 1895

**Year (Hebrew):** 5655

**Year:** 1895

**Location:** Europe – Western

**Short description**

This is an illustration of Alfred Dreyfus’ degradation ceremony that appeared on the front cover of the French newspaper Le Petit Journal on January 13, 1895.

**Detailed description**

​This is an illustration of Alfred Dreyfus’ degradation ceremony that appeared on the front cover of the French newspaper *Le Petit Journal* on January 13, 1895. The picture shows Dreyfus standing erect and bare of his military decorations in a courtyard with a parade of military men. The officer in front of him is breaking Dreyfus’ sword in two. Below the picture are the words: “The Traitor. The Degradation of Alfred Dreyfus.”

Following a court martial on charges of espionage and treason, the French-Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus was sent to life imprisonment on Devil’s Island. On January 5, 1895, before his deportation, soldiers, officials, journalists and other invited guests gathered in the courtyard of the École Militaire for his public degradation ceremony. Dreyfus had his military ranks ripped off his uniform and his sword broken in two. Beyond the gates, an angry crowd shouted: “Death to the Jews.” Dreyfus proclaimed his innocence and, raising his arms in the air, cried out: “Innocent! Innocent! Vive la France.”

After the humiliating ceremony, Dreyfus was held in a prison in solitary confinement, then transferred to the prison on Île de Ré, and finally deported to Devil’s Island. Only four years later was he brought back to France for a retrial, and he was finally officially acquitted in 1906.

**Would You Like to Know More?**

**The Dreyfus Affair**– Alfred Dreyfus was born in 1859 to a Jewish family in Alsace in the east of France. Dreyfus joined the French Army and was promoted to the rank of captain in the artillery corps in 1889. In 1894, the French Army’s counter intelligence section became aware of classified information being passed on to the German Army. Suspicion quickly fell on Dreyfus, and he was arrested in October 1894 and convicted of treason in a secret court martial. Dreyfus was stripped of his rank and military decorations before a large crowd of cheering onlookers in a “degradation ceremony” and was deported to Devil’s Island, a penal colony off the coast of South America. Throughout his trial Dreyfus claimed his innocence, and in the degradation ceremony he cried out: “I swear that I am innocent. I remain worthy of serving in the army. Long live France! Long live the army!” The many activists and intellectuals who supported Dreyfus were known as Dreyfusards. The famous French writer Émile Zola published an open letter titled “J’accuse” in a Paris newspaper, accusing the president and government of France of anti-Semitism and of the wrongful imprisonment of Alfred Dreyfus. The anti-Dreyfusards, on the other hand, saw the affair as an example of the unpatriotic views held by the Jews. They saw Dreyfus’ roots in Alsace (a territory still being disputed by France and Germany) as proof of his affiliation to Germany. The protests finally succeeded, and in 1896 Alfred Dreyfus was returned to France and given a second trial. Despite the evidence brought before the court, Dreyfus was again found guilty of treason. Public opinion, however, forced President Émile Loubet to grant a pardon, and in 1899 Dreyfus was released from prison. He, nonetheless, officially remained a traitor until his full acquittal in 1906.

**Teaching Suggestions**

​ Teachers could show it in **Jewish** **History** lessons when teaching about anti-Semitism, the life of the Jews in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, and the Holocaust.

This resource could also be used in lessons such as **English**, **History**, **Citizenship**, and even **Arts** to explore the impact of pictures and images on public opinion.

**Discussion Points**

**Observation**

* What scene is depicted in this illustration?
* When and why did it happen?
* Compare Dreyfus’ uniform to the uniform of the soldier in front of him.
* Why is there such a difference?
* Describe the different characters in the picture.
* What does Dreyfus’ posture tell us?
* What does the image of the soldier opposite Dreyfus tell us?

**Reading Between the Lines**

* **​**The ceremony depicted here was intended to humiliate Alfred Dreyfus.
* How was this done?

**Connections**

* Imagine that Alfred Dreyfus wrote a diary.
* What do you think he would have written on the evening of January 5, 1895?
* Can you think of any other occasions when people were publicly humiliated?
* This picture represents to many the drama of the Dreyfus Affair.
* Can you think of other pictures that represent major historical events?

**Target audience:** Junior High, High School, Informal Education, Higher Education

**NLI Links**

[The Dreyfus Affair](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/collections/PersonalWebs/Dreyfus/Pages/default.aspx)

[Shana Tova, Alfred Dreyfus, 1901](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLI/English/digitallibrary/pages/viewer.aspx?docid=EDU_XML_ENGSP222&presentorid=EDU_XML_ENG&searchurl=http%3A%2F%2Fweb.nli.org.il%2Fsites%2Fnlis%2Fen%2Feducation%2Fpages%2Fresults.aspx%23%3Fquery%3Dlsr16%2Cexact%2CPrimary+Source%26query%3Dany%2Ccontains%2Cdreyfus%26institution%3DNNL%26vid%3DEDU_XML_ENG%26loc%3Dlocal%2Cscope%3A(EDU_XML_ENG)%26sortField%3Dlso04%26indx%3D1%26bulkSize%3D8)  
[​​The Dreyfus Affair Time​line](http://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/en/education/Pages/Dreyfus-Timeline.aspx)