

Lettre de William George Oppenheim à Émile Zola datée du 2 mars 1898

Auteur(s) : Oppenheim, William George

Transcription

Texte de la lettre

Papier à lettre

Déjà dactylographié en haut à gauche :

_ against _

Déjà dactylographié en haut à droite :

William George Oppenheim,

Attorney and Counselor at law,

World Building,

Room 82.

61 Park Row, New York City.

Opposite city hall.

Office hours 2-4pm

Dactylographié en noir :

New York, March 2nd, 1898

Mr Emile Zola,

Paris, France.

My dear sir - :

Will you permit a stranger from a strange land to offer you (and those who have suffered with you, Messrs Leblois, Laori, Clemenceau and the Editor of the Aurore) his heartfelt sympathy and his confident hope that the "criminals" and peace disturbers of to-day, shall be the heroes of to-morrow. I utter no views as to the guilt or innocence of Dreyfus but I do protest with all my strength, with all my head and heart and soul and with every fibre of my body against the broad juridical farce of your trial and that of Dreyfus-...

A trial which would provoke only derisive laughter, were it not that the practical consequences are so grave and so lamentable. There is not an intelligent reader, in the civilized world, who does not know that, whether or not Dreyfus was guilty of the offense of which he was convicted and for which he is undergoing punishment, he has not been legally proved guilty.

The evidence before the court-martial that he wrote the bordereau was very flimsy.

The evidence before the civil court that it was not written by him is overwhelming.

When the bordereau was recognized not to be conclusive evidence, the men who were interested began to produce other evidence, and this process has gone on during your trial^[1] - I beg pardon, - during the Army's trial.

Generals in uniform have been allowed to appear on the stand and testify to the existence of conclusive and damning evidence against Dreyfus, which they were not forced to produce, nor were their stories allowed to be tested by cross examination.

That Mr. Labori did not make out your case in full may fairly be ascribed to the fact that whenever he appeared to be on the point of proving it, the Court intervened, in the interest of "the security of the country," or of something else besides justice, to prevent the proof.

The condemnation of the Dreyfus court-martial was unduly arbitrary and should be regarded as morally inconclusive, even after all allowance which legitimately may be made for drumhead tribunals are made. Your trial which was a proceeding, not in a military, but in a civil tribunal, is simply beyond the pale of juridical criticism.

The particular significance of this episode is political rather than legal, but I do not purpose to enter the subject further than to suggest two general reflections.

It was from the standpoint of the French authorities a piece of the most shortsighted silliness to set in motion, or permit a public arraignment, and the travesty of an alleged legal trial.

Your (ostensibly) public trial has been as substantially arbitrary and iniquitously unjust a proceeding as could have been conducted before a secret court-martial... And the civilized world has been treated to the spectacle of "the honor of the French army" being protected through fighting a man with his hands

tied behind him. It was more than unjust. It was cowardly.

The reflection may also occur that the French Government of today displays the characteristic abuses of both a republic and a monarchy, without the redeeming virtues of either.

Rightly or wrongly, republic are supposed by many to tend inevitably toward official corruption ; yet in a republic (which at all deserves the name) individual liberty is secure against arbitrary invasion upon secret charges.

Your trial and that of Dreyfus, as episodes, are absolute stultifications of the French spirit of 1789.

Indeed they represent as essential a revival of medievalism as anything that could be pointed to in the recent history of Russia.

The courage of the French authorities in this matter has been an extraordinary psychological study. The French are acute, keenwitted, and usually clear sighted, and yet in this case they seem to be afflicted with mental strabismus... Leaving moral considerations out of account, it would appear obvious to any normal mind that a national scandal could not be suppressed by piling other scandals on top of it.

You were prosecuted (persecuted is the proper term) to vindicate the Government's treatment of Dreyfus. If that object could be attained at all, it could be only by such signal fairness in the second trial as would create a presumption of fairness in the first.

Instead of that the Government has exerted itself, by suppressing the truth and punishing all who dare to disclose it, to prove that all the accusations against its original procedure were well founded.

The ostrich who pokes his head in the sand and thinks that he has made himself invisible appears as an intellectual giant compared with the men that have done this thing.

The most extraordinary feature of the whole inexplicable affair is that the childish strategy of the Government has apparently been completely effective with the French people.

With assurance of regard and esteem, I remain, sir,

Yours sincerely,

Signature : William George Oppenheim

[1] Mot barré.

Les folios

En passant la souris sur une vignette, le titre de l'image apparaît.

Relations

Ce document n'a pas de relation indiquée avec un autre document du projet.□

Citer cette page

Oppenheim, William George, Lettre de William George Oppenheim à Émile Zola datée du 2 mars 1898, 1898-03-02

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Consulté le 12/01/2026 sur la plate-forme EMAN :

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Présentation

GenreCorrespondance

Date d'envoi[1898-03-02](#)

AdresseWorld Building, Room 82, 61 Park Row, New York City

Description & Analyse

DescriptionSoutien, décrit le procès, dit que la France régresse philosophiquement.
Notesnon

Information générales

Langue[Anglais](#)

CoteAME1898_03_02 LEA.56.Oppenheim.02031898.NY

Éléments codicologiques Lettre originale sans enveloppe, papier à lettre George William Oppenheim, deux feuilles dactylographiées recto verso, donc quatre pages.

Source

- Collection famille Émile-Zola
- Dreyfus
- France
- procès

Informations éditoriales

Éditeur de la ficheCentre d'Étude sur Zola et le Naturalisme & Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes, CNRS-ENS ; projet EMAN (CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne Nouvelle).

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Notice créée par [Richard Walter](#) Notice créée le 21/12/2018 Dernière modification le 21/08/2020
