

## **Papon v. France :**

### Historians' expertise at the trial.

I chose to prepare the Papon case to illustrate the crucial importance of historians in certain trials. Maurice Papon was a French politician, he was Mayor of Saint-Amand-Montrond, member of the French Parliament and the French minister of Budget under the Barre government from 1978 to 1981.

In December 1981, 4 people (Maurice-David Matisson, Jean-Marie Matisson, Jacqueline Matisson et Esther Fogiel) sued Papon for crimes against humanity because of his alleged participation in deportation of Jews in Occupied France during the second World War.

In 1983, France tried Papon for complicity to crimes against humanity because in France under Act 64-1 326 of 1964 crimes against humanity are imprescriptible. Nevertheless, the inquisitorial procedure did not begin until 1997.

In 1998, Maurice Papon was found guilty of complicity to crimes against humanity and was subsequently sentenced to 10 years of prison and deprivation of his civic rights by the french court; "cour d'assise".

Historians had an important role to Papon condemnation because of the widespread use of archives and the necessary presence of experts for this period to help judges and lawyers to better understand the context of Vichy government. For Béatrice Fleury and Jacques Walter ( "*Le Procès Papon*" *Médias, témoin-expert et contre expertise historiographique*, Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire, 2005/4 no 88, p63-76. Presses de Sciences Po) the Papon case was crucial in the public debate around relationship between Lawyers, Courts and Historians. Since 1997, the question of historians' role during trial frequently arises.

Moreover, according to the authors presence of historians were justified because trial was very late and described as "historic" by French journalists.

However, for Henry Rousso ( French Historian) the question of researcher's involment is very dangerous because in his point of view the professor must be careful to not mix research activities and private commitment; especially during his lesson.