

First Female Lawyer in Prussia

Dr. Margarete Berent

July 9, 1887, Berlin – June 23, 1965, New York



Margarete Berent in her 40s, in her lawyer's robe

"I have not been able to attain a sufficient and sustained means of support."

Dr. Margarete Berent,
November 1959

Margarete Berent, the daughter of a businessman, graduated from high school in Berlin, in 1910, and went on to study law, completing her studies with a doctoral dissertation in 1914. Her dissertation on family law received a "magna cum laude" and was published in a well-respected scholarly series in 1915. (Over forty years later, in 1958, it served as a model for the legal reform of inheritance and property laws in the Federal Republic of Germany). Despite her outstanding dissertation, Margarete Berent was neither admitted to become judge nor an attorney. This would have required her to pass the bar examination (*Staatsexamen*), which women were not allowed to take. Instead, she worked as a "legal assistant" in lawyers' offices and legal protection agencies for women and temporarily for the Berlin municipal administration.

In 1919, during the Weimar Republic, women were finally allowed to take the *Staatsexamen*, for which Margarete Berent applied immediately. She passed the first examination in 1919 with an above average grade of "good." After a legal clerkship and passing the second *Staatsexamen*, she opened her own law office in March of 1925 in Berlin—the first female lawyer in Prussia ever and a successful one at that. Looking back, she wrote in the 50s: "By 1933 the law firm had become the foundation of my livelihood. I had succeeded in establishing myself well enough to maintain my own office with an adequate income

and was able to travel abroad repeatedly... I might want to add that I enjoyed trust, prestige and growing recognition... I spoke on the radio several times, in Hamburg, among other places, and during a program on family law at the Central Institute for Education and Teaching..."

Margarete Berent was a member of several women's associations, active in legal organizations and also taught at vocational schools for social work. She was an advocate for the recognition of women in all professions, particularly in jurisprudence, and for social and legal equality.

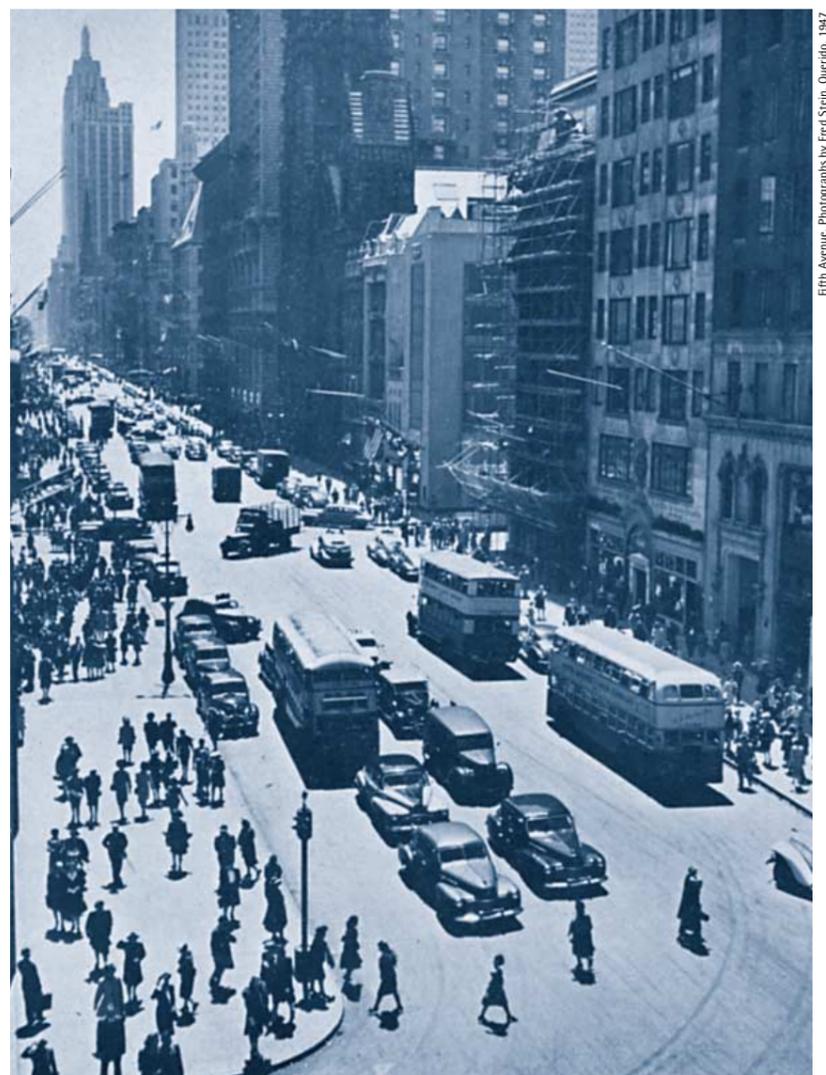
At the same time, she was a member of the board of representatives of the Jewish Community Berlin and belonged to the board of the Prussian Regional Association of Jewish Communities.

After the Nazis came to power, Margarete Berent was barred from practicing law and forced to close her office. She found a new position at the Central Welfare Agency of German Jews in Berlin and Cologne, where she became active in mid-1933.

At the end of 1939, already after the outbreak of war, she was able to flee via Switzerland and Italy to Chile. She lived in Chile until the end of July 1940, earning a living as a language teacher. Finally, she received a visa for the US (that she had already applied for in 1938) and arrived in New York in August of 1940.

The U.S. and the vibrant metropolis had not exactly been waiting for Prussia's first female lawyer to arrive. Still, she remained in New York. Margarete Berent worked as a household help and in postal delivery. In 1942, she began studying American law in the evening, while working on the side by day. In 1948 she received her LL.B. from New York University School of Law and passed the New York State bar examination in 1949. In 1950, at the age of 63, she started working as a lawyer again. From 1953 until the end of 1959, she was employed at the legal department of the City of New York.

Margarete Berent remained a lawyer until the end of her life, even though her profession did not provide her with adequate material support again. She died in New York in 1965, shortly before her 78th birthday.



View of 34th Street and Empire State Building, 1940s

Dissolving Prussia

Wilhelm Dickmann (later William Dickman)

October 13, 1900, Hermsdorf/Berlin – October 28, 1987, Alexandria, Virginia

"..There we were faced with a large white marble bust of Adolph Hitler standing high on a pedestal – a perfect piece of evidence that the spirit of the Fuehrer was not at all dead in [the court of] Altenburg. Major Haskell, who had gone through agony during all this, dashed forward, grabbed the bust with both hands and smashed it on the floor with all the energy he could muster. With a terrific crash, it broke into hundreds of pieces. What a relief for us all!"

Dickman's memories of 1945

Immediately after graduating from high school, Wilhelm Dickmann was drafted to fight for Germany at the Western front during the last months of World War I. Back in Berlin, he studied law enduring much personal and financial hardship. After graduation, he worked in the law office of Bruno Weil before opening his own practice.

After the Nazi takeover in 1933, Dickmann, who had been baptized as a child, was considered "non-Aryan" and was threatened with losing his profession under the Nazi laws. However, since he was a World War I veteran who had fought at the front, he was able to continue practicing as a lawyer.

On September 25, 1938, around 2 a.m. the telephone rang: "Hello, I understand that you are going on your vacation tomorrow. I just heard the latest weather report. The weather will change radically later in the morning, so it would be advisable for you to take the earliest possible flight out..." and hung up. Dickmann didn't recognize the voice at all, but the warning was unambiguous. He got ready immediately, said good-bye to his sister and gravely ill father—he was not to see them again—and fled to his brother in Copenhagen. At the end of 1938 he traveled on to New York on a tourist visa.

His German legal degree was not recognized in the U.S., so he took on several odd jobs, such as night checker in a restaurant, working 12 hour shifts at night, writing short stories and articles by day under the name William Dickman.

In 1939, Dickman won one of eight scholarships granted to European jurists. In 1943 he graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and married Ilka Deutsch, a physician and daughter of a former rabbi from Prague. The couple first lived in Philadelphia, where Ilka had begun practicing as a physician again.

After becoming an American citizen in 1944, William Dickman served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and was deployed to Great Britain. In 1945, he returned to his hometown Berlin as an officer with the American troops. As a staff member of the American high commissioner General Lucius D. Clay he wrote the Control Council Law No. 26 of February 25, 1947, that decreed the dissolution of Prussia.

Dickman never saw his family members again: His father had died, his sister and her husband had been murdered in a concentration camp. Ilka Dickman's father, Dr. Aladar Deutsch, had survived the concentration camp of Terezin, but was a broken man. After 1945, Dickman attempted to improve the general situation in Germany and ameliorate the hardship of the German population as a member of the U.S. armed forces. Ilka Dickman pursued the same goals in her work at UNRRA on behalf of Displaced Persons.

Dickman also played an important role in rebuilding the German judicial system, such as the reopening of the administrative court in Bavaria and the Nuremberg military tribunal. The Dickmans returned to the U.S. in 1948. William Dickman continued working for the government in Washington until his retirement at the age of 70. The couple settled in Alexandria, Virginia, where Ilka Dickman died in 1983, William Dickman in 1987, at the age of 87.



William Dickman in the 1950s

A Bouquet of Stories by William Dickman, Corporate Press, 1986



William Dickman with his wife Ilka and her father, Rabbi Dr. Aladar Deutsch, formerly of Prague, 1947

The Long, long Trail with You, 1984



William Dickman in US Army uniform in London, 1945

Ilka and William Dickman, The Long, long Trail with You, 1984

Momentous Times, the 1920s

Eugen Friedlaender

September 16, 1878, Berlin – June 16, 1952, New York



Eugen Friedlaender as a young man

Private collection

„Fama crescit eundo –
the rumor grows
as it goes about...“

Friedlaender's first words of his plea
in the Erzberger case, 1920

Eugen Friedlaender was a German patriot who fought for Germany in World War I. After graduation and legal training (*Referendariat*), Friedlaender settled in Berlin.

In the early years of the Republic he was asked to represent the co-plaintiff in a lawsuit that was among the most spectacular cases in Germany during the 1920s: Finance minister Mathias Erzberger had sued the banker and rightwing politician Karl Helfferich, because the latter had

publicly accused Erzberger of various malfeasances and started a propaganda campaign against him. Helfferich had called Erzberger a "spoiler of the empire" and demanded Erzberger's resignation in German newspapers. This case became significant because it demonstrated the power of the press and the risks involved for the plaintiff. In the course of the lawsuit, Helfferich's lawyers, among them the attorney Max Alsberg, forced Erzberger into a more and more defensive position. Before the judgement, the effects of the hate campaign against Erzberger manifested themselves: he was shot by a young man in court. The "*Berliner Tageblatt*" reported in bold type on the front page on January 27, 1920: Assassination attempt against Erzberger. His lawyer, Dr. Friedlaender, "...jumped at the young man trying to wrest the gun away from him. However, before his attempt succeeded, the young man shot a second time, Erzberger fell to the ground, uttering a cry of pain..." Erzberger survived, because his courageous lawyer was able to help him. In the end, Erzberger supported by his lawyers won the case. But Helfferich was fined 300 Reichsmark, a relatively small sum, while Erzberger's position was seriously compromised and he was forced to resign. When Erzberger tried to return to politics a year later, he became the victim of a second assassination attempt by two rightwing attackers who shot and killed him.

Friedlaender was a very honorable member of society and distinguished lawyer, also at the highest court in Germany—in Leipzig—, nevertheless avoided litigation whenever he could. He remained a successful counsel for huge companies and mining cartels, among others, but also to many families.

After the takeover of the Nazis, the atmosphere changed radically and many people outed themselves as members of the party. Friedlaender's son remembers: "My father had a meeting as counsel of the *Steinsalz-Syndikat* (rock salt syndicate) at the Adlon the day Hitler took power at the end of January. Father's car arrived at the *Brandenburger Tor* (Brandenburg Gate), a uniformed storm trooper mounted the running boards, and he was escorted to the Adlon where everybody came to attention and he was received as an honored guest. The ceremony was repeated when he departed and he asked his chauffeur why. The driver sheepishly confided that, ...he had shown his N.S.D.A.P. membership card with its extremely low number which he had precautionarily taken out while Hitler was still one of the unknown extremist troublemakers or even in jail..."

On March 30, 1933, a day before the countrywide boycott day instigated by the Nazis, Friedlaender and his wife were on vacation in San Remo. As a "veteran who fought at the front," Friedlaender was still able to continue practicing law, but was disbarred a year later, as the note "inactive" in his file indicates. Friedlaender left everything behind when he left Berlin and arrived in New York in 1937, where he spent the rest of his life, however, without working as a lawyer again. He died at the age of 73 in June 1952.



Impressions from the Helfferich trial in the press

Landesarchiv Berlin, Rep. 58, Film 334-338



Eugen Friedlaender and his wife Hedwig, née Gumpel, with their son and daughter, about 1920

Private collection



Eugen Friedlaender, drawing by the well-known artist Eugen Spiro, 1949

Private collection

The Only Female Legal Consultant in Germany

Hanna Katz

October 23, 1895, Berlin – July, 1982, New York

“...police notice of departure of June 6, 1941, the day of my emigration...”

Hanna Katz's father had been a lawyer before her and bore the title Privy Councilor of Justice. Barely 35 years old, Hanna Katz opened her own law office, which was temporarily located on Berlin's glamorous "Unter den Linden". During her legal training, Katz had already established close ties with international associations of jurists and even took an exam as an interpreter. She was on the board of the International Law Association, specializing in competition and trademark law.

In the spring of 1933, the National Socialists decreed a ban on all practicing Jewish lawyers, with the exception of veterans of World War I and lawyers who had been practicing before 1914. These were conditions women could obviously not meet, since they had been admitted to the legal profession only in the 1920s. Hanna Katz would have been disbarred like most Jews, had this not meant losing her seat for Germany at the International Law Association, which would probably have gone to a colleague from Great Britain.

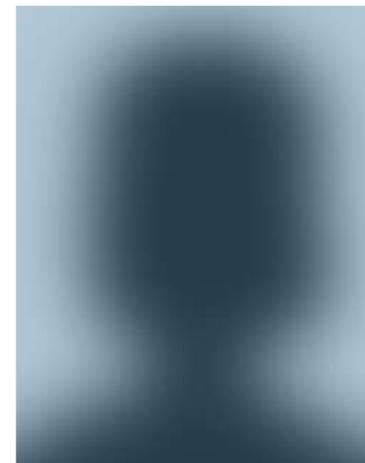
In order to prevent this from happening, an exception was made and Katz was able to continue to practice. In 1936 she went to a conference in Budapest with the German delegation headed by the high Nazi functionary Hans Frank.

When the general ban on Jewish lawyers was decreed in November 1938, Hanna Katz was affected as well. In the meantime, she called herself Hannacha, possibly to avoid having to take the compulsory name "Sara". At this time, Hanna Katz was admitted as a legal consultant and—as research to date seems to indicate—the sole female Jewish law consultant and representative for Jews. The only stipulation was for her not to appear in court. In the meantime, Hanna Katz shared office space with another legal consultant, while working on her emigration. Finally, in 1941, she obtained the last necessary visa, the transit visa for Portugal. She asked her secretary to liquidate her office, gave all her articles of value to her shoemaker, her "Aryan" dentist, and the owners of a fashion boutique on *Kurfürstendamm*.

On the very next day, June 6, 1941, she flew to Lisbon, from where she went to the U.S. by boat.

Hanna Katz was not to see any of her confidants again: her colleague from the office, as well as her secretary with her husband and their four children were murdered; the dentist soon died after her departure, the two Danish owners of the fashion boutique fled to Denmark in the last days of the war.

In the U.S. Hanna Katz had an easier start than others on account of her good command of the English language. After the end of World War II she was admitted as an attorney both in New York and in Germany. In addition, she was a member of numerous organizations in New York and was on the board of the American Association of Former European Jurists for many years.



No likeness of Hanna Katz has been found



Justice, bas-relief above the entrance of the District Court in Berlin where Hanna Katz was admitted as an attorney.

Berlin und seine Bauten, Verlag Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1906

Vergessen Sie nicht, sich in den Kundendienst für den Jedermann und sich bei Postanfragen nachweislich juristisch zu informieren, um Sie der Missverständnisse zu vermeiden!

Abmeldung bei der polizeilichen Meldebehörde

als Personalausweis

Am 6. Juni 1941 verließ

nach New York City (U.S.A.)

Bitte Wohnung: Berlin - Charlottenburg 4

Ehe- Stz.	Familienname (bei Frauen auch Geburtsname und gegebenenfalls Name aus der letzten früheren Ehe)	Vornamen (Kürzliche, Rufname unterscheiden)	Familien- stand (Ehe, verh., verw., gesd.)	Beruf (genaue Beschreibung der Berufstätigkeit und Angabe, ob selbständig oder Angestellter, Arbeiter usw.)	Geburts-	
					Tag	Monat
	<u>Katz, In.</u>	<u>Hannacha</u>	<u>led.</u>	<u>Konsultantin</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>II</u>

Hanna Katz's notice to the police of her departure from Berlin on June 6, 1941

Hanna Katz
Rechtsanwalt

Signature of Hanna Katz, 1937

Landschaft Berlin

A Life for the Law

Ernst Stiefel

November 27, 1907, Mannheim - September 3, 1997, Baden-Baden



Ernst Stiefel, 1960s

"The United States was not receiving them with open arms."

From Introduction to Conference on the influence of German refugees on American and German law, 1991

He left Germany, first went to Strasbourg working for a French insurance company, since German law remained in effect after World War I in Alsace. At the same time, he studied law for a second time receiving the licence en droit (1934), the diplôme d'études supérieures (1935). Realizing that as a refugee and a German he had no future in France, he left for England and received a British law degree in 1938. After the outbreak of World War II, he was interned as an enemy alien, but succeeded in securing an exit visa for the U.S and left Europe on September 14, 1939.

After his arrival in New York, and after initial jobs as chauffeur, busboy and dishwasher, he was able to pass the bar exam without having to study law again due to his English law degree. He wrote articles for various journals concerning martial law and questions

of insurance. Due to his acquaintance with John Foster Dulles, he became involved with the Board of Economic Warfare researching and writing on insurance questions in German occupied territories. In December 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. army but deployed with the Office of Strategic Services.

After the war, he worked at the of State Department, the US Embassy in Rome, and for the military government in Germany. He returned to the U.S. in 1947 and became an attorney, since 1970 with the firm of Coudert Brothers. He worked as legal advisor in large investment projects, both for German as well as American companies. In addition, like his fellow attorney Otto Walter, Stiefel trained a new generation of legal professionals at the New York Law School.



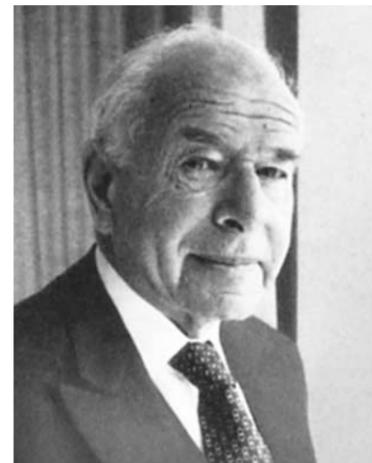
PanAm Building (now Met Life), in which Ernst Stiefel had his office

The son of a prominent teacher in Mannheim, Ernst Stiefel already published his first book, a commentary on car insurance, during the period of his legal training (*Referendariat*). The first edition appeared in 1931, the 17th edition is currently in print with C.H. Beck Verlag in Munich. He opened his own law office in his hometown immediately after qualifying to practice law by passing the second state examination (*Staatsexamen*) in 1933. Only two weeks later, however, was banned from practicing his profession for being a Jew.



Mannheim, market square "Planken" and post office, about 1925

Stadtarchiv Mannheim



Jurist im Portrait, C.H. Beck, 1988

Ernst Stiefel, 1990s

Per Aspera Ad Astra (from the detestable to the everlasting)

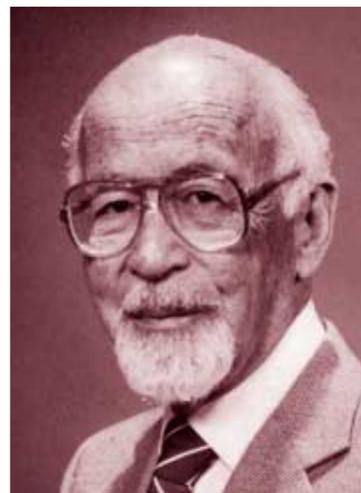
Otto Walter

December 7, 1907, Hof, Bavaria – January 12, 2003, New York

“All of this as well as other issues dashed my hopes of having landed in a better world. On the other hand, my conviction remains – justified or not – that the laws granting the right to liberty that are in part anchored in the constitution and partly the result of interpretation by the courts, do outweigh the disadvantages...”

Otto Walter in his memoirs, 1995

Otto Walter, the son of a Bavarian notary, settled in Munich after his legal training in 1932. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, he was immediately banned from practicing and emigrated to the U.S. in 1936. Barely conversant in English, he considered himself lucky to have landed a position as a bookkeeper in a hotel on Broadway. In his own estimation he brought all sorts of qualifications to this position, except for a knowledge of bookkeeping. In an earlier attempt to apply for a job, he had been overwhelmed by the sheer number of competitors, thinking to himself: “How will I ever survive in this jungle?” Exceedingly happy to hold a job at all, he acquired the necessary bookkeeping skills at night and became a private accountant and—after additional training—a certified public accountant (CPA). In the meantime, his parents had arrived in the U.S. as well. His father had been arrested during the November 9/10, 1938 pogroms and been incarcerated in the Dachau concentration camp. Working now as a senior accountant in an accounting firm, Walter was able to support his parents. At the end of the war his knowledge of both the American as well as German tax systems turned out to be a great advantage.



Otto Walter in his 80s

Otto and Fran Walter Foundation

In 1946 Otto Walter returned to Munich, hoping to become readmitted to the German bar. The Bavarian minister of justice, Josef Müller, assured him that his request should pose no problem since his disbarment had been unlawful. The president of the Munich bar association, however, saw things differently: In his opinion, a readmission was possible only, if Walter were to settle in Munich permanently, thus fulfilling the residency requirement for attorneys. In addition, he would have to become a German citizen again as the Nazi regime had revoked the citizenship of all Jews living abroad at the end of 1941. Otto Walter abandoned his plans for the time being, but was readmitted as an attorney in Germany, once the residency requirement had been removed.

In his accounting practice in New York, Otto Walter had been dealing with an increasing number of legal issues and decided to study law in evening classes at the New York Law School, from which he graduated two years later, at the age of 46. Shortly thereafter Walter opened his own firm, which soon began to focus on cases involving tax, inheritance and trust law. Walter practiced both in the U.S. and Germany and his firm with headquarters on Park Avenue became a very reputable address. Based on his vast knowledge of the tax system, he published a bilingual commentary on the double taxation treaty (1954/66) and also taught at the New York Law School.

In the 1980s, Walter assumed the role of the firm’s senior partner. The Federal Republic of Germany recognized his contributions by awarding him the Order of Merit and later the Great Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Together with his wife, to whom he had been married since 1947, Walter established the Otto and Fran Walter Foundation. Equipped with a good sense of humor, Walter was a devoted jurist, a well-rounded and intellectually curious man and, above all, a true humanist.



Otto Walter with his wife Frances

Otto and Fran Walter Foundation



New York Public Library, a well-known meeting point for European emigrants, during the 1940s

Fifth Avenue. Photographs by Fred Stein, Querido, 1947

A Traveler Across All Continents

Bruno Weil

April 4, 1883, Saarlouis – November 11, 1961, New York

I looked at many additional files, I cannot list them all here, but they all form one single picture, a characteristic trait of Nazism: Cruelty and disrespect of others; an obsession with writing and an excruciating emphasis on details. On a few occasions, some penciled in comments come across as an attempt to promote a more humane point of view."

Weil in an article after visiting Berlin, June 1949



Bruno Weil, 1920s

Leo Baeck Institute, AR 7108, Photos Box III

Bruno Weil, a German Alsatian, opened a law firm in Strasbourg in 1910. From 1915 to 1918 he served in the German army during World War I, initially on the Western front. After publishing an article critical of the situation in Alsace in a Frankfurt newspaper, he was court-martialed and sent to the Eastern front. Bruno Weil was never shy to speak his mind, at times very forcefully, a trait that was never to leave him as long as he lived. In 1920 he left Alsace—which had become French again after World War I—and settled in Berlin, where he worked as a trade lawyer and notary. In addition, Weil served as secretary of

the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith, the *Centralverein*, an organization dedicated to fighting anti-Semitism. In 1930, the *Centralverein* nominated him deputy of the Reichstag, the German parliament, as a member of the German State Party, whose only Jewish candidate he was.

Weil also published several books, including a publication on the Dreyfus trial that ends with the words: "There is no freedom without justice!" Apart from German, he spoke French and English fluently, gaining him a position as a legal representative at the French embassy in Berlin.

As a war veteran who had fought at the front and member of the bar before 1914, Weil was able to continue practicing as an attorney even after the Nazis came to power in 1933. However, he was prohibited from practicing as a notary in 1935.

Weil and his wife Alice became citizens of Argentina in 1936. The couple traveled extensively and on a trip to Paris in 1939, were caught in France after the outbreak of World War II. Weil was interned as an enemy alien in the Le Vernet camp in the Pyrenees and was not reunited with his wife in the U.S. until 1940. He wrote about his experiences in the camp in an eyewitness report titled, "Barracks 37 – Stand at Attention! I Saw France's Downfall from behind Barbed Wire."

The couple traveled untiringly across the American continent organizing aid committees for European refugees. In 1942, Weil co-founded the Axis Victims League and the American Association of Former European Jurists in New York and became its vice president.

After the end of World War II Weil became involved in restitution matters and worked to strengthen democracy in his old home country. In addition, he created a network of institutions supporting immigrants. When Weil died in 1961 at the age of 78, one of the speakers at his funeral expressed what many might have felt, "His life was fulfilled. May we derive comfort from the thought that he enjoyed it." (Lowenthal)



Bruno Weil with fraternity brothers

Leo Baeck Institute, AR 7108, Photos Box III



Dr. Ernesto J. B. Weil and Mrs. Weil who arrived from New York yesterday.

REUNITED AND SAFE

Life in Concentration Camps

AFTER a dramatic reunion in New York, following months of separation in French concentration camps, Dr. Bruno Weil, prominent international lawyer and legal author, with his charming wife Alicia, sailed from New York on the Brazil and arrived in Buenos Aires yesterday.

Newspaper article on Bruno Weil's reunion with his wife Alicia after release from French concentration camps, 1940

Leo Baeck Institute, AR 7108