



**CARDOZO**

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

**LARC @ Cardozo Law**

---

Cardozo News 2021

Cardozo News

---

5-6-2021

## **Professor Richard H. Weisberg Assuming Emeritus Status in Spring 2021**

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: <https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/cardozo-news-2021>

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, "Professor Richard H. Weisberg Assuming Emeritus Status in Spring 2021" (2021). *Cardozo News 2021*. 47.

<https://larc.cardozo.yu.edu/cardozo-news-2021/47>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Cardozo News at LARC @ Cardozo Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Cardozo News 2021 by an authorized administrator of LARC @ Cardozo Law. For more information, please contact [larc@yu.edu](mailto:larc@yu.edu).

## Professor Richard H. Weisberg Assuming Emeritus Status in Spring 2021



Richard H. Weisberg, the Walter Floersheimer Professor of Constitutional Law at Cardozo School of Law, announced that he will retire from teaching at the end of this semester after a long and distinguished career as a professor of law, program director and world-renowned scholar. He is widely praised for his legal scholarship and litigation on behalf of victims of the Holocaust and their heirs, and for providing a measure of justice for World War II victims of Anti-Semitism.

“Richard has inspired generations of Cardozo students,” said Dean Melanie Leslie. “His contributions have had an enormous impact on the reputation of this law school. He has helped shape our understanding of human rights, specifically with respect to the horrors of the Holocaust, and has made important contributions to modern legal and ethical theory.”

A longtime member of the Cardozo faculty, he was an inaugural co-director of the *Floersheimer Center for Constitutional Democracy*, established in 2000 by Dean Paul Verkuil. The Center is the law school’s hub for scholarship, symposia and events that advance the functioning of constitutional democracies in the United States and abroad. Under Dean David Rudenstine's tenure, Weisberg also

founded the *Cardozo Law Institute in Holocaust and Human Rights*, formerly the *Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Program*. Some of the unclaimed funds awarded to victims of banks that liquidated Jewish assets during World War II, cases in which Weisberg was instrumental, were granted to Cardozo for establishment of the Institute. Weisberg will be honored with the Monrad Paulsen Award at Cardozo's upcoming Commencement on June 1. The award is given each year to a member of the faculty or administration or to an individual who has provided devoted service to the continued vitality of the ideals and purposes of legal education, in memory of Cardozo's founding Dean, Monrad Paulsen.

Weisberg's scholarly research and litigation work advanced Jewish restitution claims in Europe, establishing Weisberg as a leading legal authority in the field. His work advanced Cardozo's early reputation for its leading global center for the study, teaching, and promotion of human rights and the Holocaust.

### **Scholarship in Law and Literature**

In the late 1970s, Weisberg was among the founders of the field of Law and Literature, and he has remained at the forefront of scholarship in this area. The peer-reviewed journal, *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, was founded under his leadership and is in its fourth decade of consecutive publication. His 1984 book, *The Failure of the Word*, examines the corruption of justice through legalistic language as depicted in great works of literature and is considered one of the key primary Law and Literature texts, having inspired countless responses from leading legal and literary scholars around the world (the book has been translated into German, Italian and French). Then followed Poethics, as the field — now taught in well over 100 U.S. law schools and in such law schools and lit departments as those in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, France, China, and Italy —has been guided into second and third generations of "narrative jurisprudence."

Professor Weisberg's book *Vichy Law and the Holocaust in France* has been widely translated and is an authoritative work on how the law was used by French attorneys under Nazi occupation to victimize French Jews. His pioneering books in the growing law and literature movement include *The Failure of the Word* and *Poethics*. In 2014, he published *In Praise of Intransigence: The Perils of Flexibility* (Oxford University Press), which argues that a willingness to embrace intransigence allows us to recognize the value of our core beliefs. His essay, *Thoughts on Kristallnacht in View of the Pittsburgh Tragedy*, was published in 2018, in the aftermath of the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh.

### **International Recognition**

President Barack Obama appointed Weisberg to the Commission on the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, recognizing him for his work as a legal scholar and litigator on behalf of Holocaust survivors and their looted art and possessions.

Weisberg received the French Legion of Honor in 2008 by then President Nicholas Sarkozy in recognition of his work uncovering the insidious inner workings of French banks during the Holocaust.

### **Litigant for the Victims of the Holocaust**

Many of the big banks of Europe during the World War II cooperated and conspired in the liquidation of Jewish assets to produce profits. Weisberg and other lawyers brought critical cases against the banks, which included not only 23 major French banks but also JPMorgan Chase and Barclays. The cases led to a settlement and the creation of a reparation fund for victims and their survivors. Weisberg, part of the plaintiffs' counsel in the case of *Bodner v. Banque Paribas*, was a signer of the multinational agreement resolving the case and setting up the machinery for French payment to victims.

His legal sleuthing and litigation helped bring a measure of justice to thousands of French Jews who suffered and perished in the Holocaust. Weisberg spoke of that work in testimony before the U.S. Congress in the late 1990s saying, "I entered into the nitty-gritty of everyday Anti-Semitism in the courts and the agencies, in the government ministries and the halls of academia, in private law firms and corporations, and in the public records of French jurisprudence."

Weisberg's meticulous work exposed the use of more than 200 French laws passed by the Vichy government during World War II to persecute French Jews, deprive them of their property, and ultimately send 75,000 people to death camps out of France.

He was honored as a keynote speaker in 2019 at a ceremony sponsored by the French government, commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the agency Weisberg helped oversee in its restitution efforts. He helped uncover the evidence that led to the creation of a compensation fund for the victims. The fund was paid primarily by the same banks that confiscated Jewish property during the war.

A Festschrift celebrating the academic career of Professor Weisberg was held in April 2016.

Weisberg holds a B.A. from Brandeis University, a Ph.D. from Cornell University in French and comparative literature, and a J.D. from Columbia Law School, where he was an editor of the *Columbia Law Review*. He has been associated with the firm of Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton in New York and Coudert Freres in Paris.