

A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of

THE
EMIL J. GUMBEL
COLLECTION

**Political Papers of an Anti-Nazi
Scholar in Weimar and Exile,
1914–1966**

**From the Archives of the
Leo Baeck Institute, New York**

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**Editorial Advisor
Arthur Brenner**

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INTRODUCTION

I. Overview of Collection

The Emil J. Gumbel Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI) contains the political papers of one of Germany's leading anti-Nazi activists from the 1920s to the 1940s. The collection includes thousands of articles in which his name appeared; hundreds of articles which he authored; several hundred pages of manuscripts and drafts of special reports he wrote in the 1940s; and thousands of clippings on political terror under the Nazi regime of the 1930s.

The newspaper clippings collected by Gumbel cover his involvement and interest in a wide range of subjects. One of the most important figures in the German pacifist movement, Gumbel was the leading chronicler of the numerous political murders and politicized justice that beset the Weimar Republic. He uncovered the illicit rearmament of the German military and identified the groups that carried out illegal acts of terror and armament, including the National Socialists. As a professor of statistics at the University of Heidelberg, he became the focal point of a prolonged and heated controversy because of his outspoken, militant pacifism, which put him at odds with the largely anti-Republican professoriate and pro-Nazi student body. Forced into exile because of his unwelcome views, he became an important figure in the German political and intellectual exile in France and the United States.

Gumbel was directly involved in the events of his day as a public speaker, author, and the target of attacks and demonstrations; and indirectly, as a trenchant observer of the ills that plagued his society. Gumbel's immediate perspective and the comprehensiveness of the collection permit one to view the Weimar Republic and the German exile from a variety of political, regional, journalistic, and chronological perspectives.

The materials in the collection also provide a sense of the raucous tenor of German political life in these years. The material offers insight into their collector as well. Gumbel was a cosmopolitan man. He was engaged in a multitude of subjects, and his work appeared in many European languages. He gave speeches and interviews; wrote political manifestos, scholarly

articles, and book reviews; and participated in many pacifist and leftist gatherings.

The collection also reflects his scholarly training and temperament. A professor of mathematical statistics, Gumbel was noted for the objectivity and the thoroughness of his political work. Intent on collecting all the available data, he gathered reports from remote corners of Germany as well as from its most famous periodicals; in some parts of the collection one finds page after page of notices on a single event. He even included articles that opposed his causes and insulted him personally. Yet Gumbel possessed a streak of irony and self-deprecation, as evinced by his label for the huge scrapbooks of articles about him: "*Eitelkeitsbücher*," he called them, literally "vanity books."

How the papers reached the LBI

Beginning in 1916 Gumbel, his friends and secretaries, and newspaper clipping services gathered articles from newspapers and journals in the German, the European, and later the American press. These included his scientific publications and related materials that were compiled separately from the political items. He took the growing collection with him to France in 1932 and to the United States in the summer of 1941, where he continued to build the collection.

Gumbel bequeathed all his manuscripts, documentary papers, letters, and files to the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. In addition to the political papers found in the microfilm, the collection includes offprints and manuscripts of his scholarly articles, reviews, and abstracts, which number over three hundred titles and are available to readers at the Leo Baeck Institute. The bequest totalled nearly twenty linear feet, or some forty archival boxes.

Standards of organization and inclusion

The Emil J. Gumbel Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute comprises five distinct sections. The first two parts form the core of the collection: seven scrapbooks of articles about Gumbel and four volumes of articles which he wrote. They cover his activity and writings from 1914 until his death in 1966, with only minor lacunae. Other sections include drafts and copies of background reports he wrote for the U.S. government in the 1940s; files of clippings on Nazi political terror in the 1930s; and miscellaneous materials.

Section A of the microfilm contains the seven "*Eitelkeitsbücher*," scrapbooks of articles of which Gumbel was the subject. The volumes are numbered chronologically, and the clippings within each were arranged by their compilers in rough chronological order. The last book is a reconstruc-

tion of a volume whose binding has disintegrated; the items were placed in chronological order by the editor. In some cases, articles had come loose from the bound volumes and were replaced in chronological order by the editor. Otherwise, most of the items are in the order and location in which Gumbel and his collaborators placed them.

Emil Gumbel's political writings comprise Section B of the microfilm. Four volumes of his articles [B 2.], which number more than five hundred items, appear in order and pagination as Gumbel arranged them; the editor added some pagination toward the end of volume IV of the articles. Also included is a handwritten list of Gumbel's political articles from 1916–1932, which is arranged alphabetically by journal title [B 1a.]. A separate list of the political articles, covering 1916–1965 and arranged by order of appearance in the volumes [B 1b.], was compiled by the editor. Finally, in section B 3. are galley proofs of an unidentified book on political terror. It was probably written in 1926 and forms a bridge between Gumbel's books *Verschwörer* (1924) and *Verräter verfallen der Feme* (1929).

In the reports for the U.S. government's Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which are found in Section C, drafts precede later or final versions; fragments and notes related to the particular paper follow. Gumbel wrote these background papers in 1944–1945 for the central European section of the OSS. The reports appear in the microfilm in their probable chronological order.* The six miscellaneous items in Section D were filmed in chronological order.

In the 1930s, Gumbel gathered thousands of newspaper clippings on terror in the Third Reich. The resulting subject files are found in Section E of the collection, which follows Gumbel's organization. His handwritten indices precede the files on "Murders" and "Brown Terror"; materials within files follow rough chronological order. His files on the Reichstag fire and the subsequent trial also are arranged chronologically.

II. Bibliography

Gumbel's published works

Gumbel was a prolific writer. The collection includes copies of more than five hundred political articles, many of them duplicates, translations, or slightly altered versions of others; and the above-mentioned galley proofs. Besides this, he authored, coauthored, and edited a dozen books and contributed articles to two more. Gumbel was also a great admirer of the

*Dating of the manuscripts is based on materials in the collection of the Leo Baeck Institute and in the Gumbel papers at the University of Chicago Library, Box 4, Files 8–9 (UC 4/8–9).

British mathematician, philosopher, and pacifist Bertrand Russell, and translated two of his books into German: *Politische Ideale* (Berlin, 1922) and *Einführung in die mathematische Philosophie* (Berlin, 1923).

Gumbel's books are listed chronologically. All of the works are in book form unless otherwise noted.

Vier Jahre Lüge, pamphlet (Berlin: Verlag Neues Vaterland, 1919).

Zwei Jahre Mord, Foreword by G. F. Nicolai (Berlin: Verlag Neues Vaterland, 1921).

Vier Jahre politischer Mord, 5th (expanded) edition of *Zwei Jahre Mord* (Berlin: Verlag der Neuen Gesellschaft, 1922); Reprinted, together with *Denkschrift*, with foreword by Hans Thill (Heidelberg: Verlag Das Wunderhorn, 1980).

Denkschrift des Reichsjustizministers zu 'Vier Jahre politischer Mord' (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1924); Reprinted, together with *Vier Jahre politischer Mord*, with foreword by Hans Thill (Heidelberg: Verlag Das Wunderhorn, 1980).

Verschwörer. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Soziologie der deutschen nationalistischen Geheimbünde seit 1918, Foreword by A. Freymuth (Vienna: Malik-Verlag, 1924); Reprinted, with foreword by Karin Buselmeier (Heidelberg: Verlag Das Wunderhorn, 1979); Reprinted, with foreword by Karen Buselmeier (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984).

Das Stahlbad des Krieges, pamphlet (Berlin: n.d. [1924]).

Deutschlands geheime Rüstungen?, co-editor, with Berthold Jacob, Paul Lange, and Paul Freiherr von Schönauich, published as *Weißbuch über die Schwarze Reichswehr* by the Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte (Berlin: Verlag der Neuen Gesellschaft, 1925).

Vom Russland der Gegenwart (Berlin: Laubsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1927); Reprinted, with foreword by Ossip K. Flechtheim (Heidelberg: Verlag Das Wunderhorn, 1982).

Verräter verfallen der Feme. Opfer/Mörder/Richter 1919–1929 (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1929); French edition, *Les crimes politiques en Allemagne*, trans. by Charles Reber (Paris: Gallimard, 1931).

'Lasst Köpfe Rollen'. *Faschistische Morde, 1924–1931*, pamphlet (Berlin: Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte, 1931).

Editor of and contributor to *Freie Wissenschaft. Ein Sammelbuch aus der deutschen Emigration* (Strasbourg: Sebastian-Brant Verlag, 1938).

"The Professor from Germany," pp. 28–57 in *We Escaped. Twelve Personal Narratives of the Flight to America*, edited with an introduction by William Allen Neilson (New York: Macmillan, 1941).

"Disarmament and Clandestine Rearmament under the Weimar Republic," pp. 203–219 in *Inspection for Disarmament*, edited by Seymour Melman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

Vom Fememord zur Reichskanzlei, Foreword by Walter Fabian (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1962). First appeared as an article under the same title in *Festsgabe für Adolf Leschnitzer anlässlich seines 60. Geburtstages*, edited by Erich Fromm and Hans Herzfeld (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1961).

Works about Gumbel

To date no biography of Gumbel has been written. Several biographical articles about him appeared in Germany in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a result of new interest in the history of the German pacifist movement and new research into the Nazi book-burnings of May 1933. A critical examination of the romanticized image of Heidelberg and its university has also led to several articles about Gumbel and to reprints of three of his books (see above, *Gumbel's published works*).

Manuscripts and articles concerning Gumbel include:

Wolfgang Benz, "Emil J. Gumbel. Die Karriere eines deutschen Pazifisten," pp. 160–198 in *10. Mai 1933. Bücherverbrennung in Deutschland und die Folgen*, edited by Ulrich Walberer (Frankfurt am Main, 1983).

Karin Buselmeier, Foreword to 1979 reprint of *Verschwörer* (see above), pp. v–xxv; and to 1984 reprint of *Verschwörer* (see above), pp. 7–31.

Christian Jansen, "Der 'Fall Gumbel' und die Heidelberger Universität 1924–1932," (mss., Heidelberg, 1981).

----, "Emil Julius Gumbel—'Ein Apostel der Justiz'," *Demokratie und Recht*, Bd. 3, 1986, pp. 331–338.

----, "Emil Julius Gumbel—Ein Statistiker des Antimilitarismus," pp. 31–42 in *Pazifismus zwischen den Weltkriegen*, edited by Dietrich Harth, Dietrich Schubert, and Ronald Michael Schmidt (Heidelberg: HVA, 1985).

----, " 'Republik—werde hart!' Der Kampf des Pazifisten Emil Julius Gumbel gegen Militarismus und Nationalismus," pp. 51–60 in *Pazifismus 1918–1933*, edited by Christiane Laaser (Bamberg: Helmut Weber, 1987).

Franz-Josef Lersch, "E. J. Gumbel als politischer Publizist der Weimarer Republik," (mss., Aachen, 1977); available in Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn.

----, "Politische Gewalt, politische Justiz und Pazifismus in der Weimarer Republik. Der Beitrag E. J. Gumbels für die deutsche Friedensbewegung," pp. 113–134 in *Pazifismus in der Weimarer Republik*, edited by Karl Holl and Wolfram Wette (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1981).

Ingeborg Sander, "Der Fall Gumbel. Auseinandersetzung um einen sozialistischen Hochschullehrer in der Weimarer Republik," (mss., Tettngang, 1971); available in Badisches Generallandesarchiv, Karlsruhe.
Hans Thill, "Gumbel/Heidelberg/Republik," Foreword to 1980 reprint of *Vier Jahre politischer Mord* (see above), pp. v–xvii.

BIOGRAPHY

Among the most noble political and moral causes of the twentieth century has been the struggle against Nazism from its gestation and turbulent youth to its murderous maturity. Few people persevered in that struggle as did Emil J. Gumbel (1891–1966), a German leftist intellectual, pacifist, socialist, and scholar who spent most of his adult life fighting to promote German democracy against militarism and Nazism. Gumbel fought this struggle against fascism zealously and courageously, despite hostility and frequent physical danger. His exposés on political terror and political justice created scandals in their day and remain the most thorough works on these subjects. He was also a fervent critic of German militarism and was the center of one of the most spectacular controversies in Weimar academic life. The Nazis branded him an enemy of the German people and hounded him into exile, where he participated extensively in emigré political and cultural activities.

Childhood and Education

Emil Julius Gumbel,¹ born on July 18, 1891, was the first of three children born to Hermann and Flora Gumbel of Munich, who were distant cousins from a prominent Jewish family in Württemberg.² Hermann Gumbel was a prosperous businessman whose family lived in fine Munich neighborhoods and sent their eldest son to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gymnasium, where Emil received a thorough humanistic education. He continued his studies at the University of Munich, where he earned his diploma in mathematics and actuarial science in 1913; a year later he was awarded a doctorate in economics with highest honors.

Despite pacifist leanings, Gumbel volunteered for military service when war broke out in 1914. He never saw combat duty, receiving a medical

¹As a university student in the 1910s, he reversed his given names, Julius Emil; see *Personalstand der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München* (Munich, 1910–1915).

²E. J. Gumbel, "Abraham Gumbel gestorben," *Süddeutsche Sonntagszeitung*, 4 January 1931.

discharge at the end of January 1915.³ He moved to Berlin and spent the rest of the war in civilian military service, using his mathematical skills first at the Adlershof aeronautics complex and later at the electronics firm Telefunken.

Nevertheless, the war changed his life. A cousin was killed in the first weeks of the conflict, and his younger brother fell in the summer of 1915.⁴ Gumbel later claimed that it was because of the war that he became a pacifist and socialist. It is unclear whether it was his military service, personal observations, or personal loss that radicalized him. Like many assimilated German Jews, he was inclined in a liberal direction even before the war. He was deeply influenced by an uncle, Abraham Gumbel of Heilbronn, who was the father of his fallen cousin and a longtime socialist sympathizer and harsh critic of the betrayal of Germany by its leadership during the war.⁵

Gumbel in Berlin, 1916–1932: Pacifist and Writer (Microfilm Sections A 1–5 and B 2, Vols. I–III)

In Berlin Gumbel became involved in antiwar intellectual circles; by November 1915 he had joined the Independent Socialist Party (USPD), which opposed the war, and the fledgling pacifist group *Bund neues Vaterland*. The Bund, which in 1922 changed its name to *Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte* (DLM), was a small, militant pacifist group devoted to ending the war; after the conflict it focused on improving Germany's relations with its former enemies and on domestic human rights issues. The DLM became Gumbel's true political home, and he became one of its most prominent figures and a member of its board of directors. He gave frequent lectures for the DLM [see microfilm, Section A 1.], including a lecture tour in France in October 1924 [Section A 2.]. He maintained his ties with the DLM during his exile in France, where he helped establish an exile section of the organization, and in the United States after World War II, where he was associated with both the International League for the Rights of Man and with attempts to reestablish the DLM in West Germany.

Gumbel was a truly independent socialist: critical of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), aloof from the German Communist Party (KPD). Except for the USPD he never joined a political party; he was by tempera-

³Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Abt. IV, Kriegsarchiv, Kriegsstammrolle 73026/277 (Emil Julius Gumbel).

⁴Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Abt. IV, Kriegsarchiv, Kriegsstammrolle 2850/1075 (Paul Gumbel).

⁵E. J. Gumbel, "Abraham Gumbel gestorben," op cit.

ment a “one-man party”.⁶ He rejected revolutionary action: at a decisive moment, during the revolution of November 1918, he spoke “against the dictatorship of the proletariat,” promoting instead the convocation of a national assembly.⁷ Nevertheless, he had high hopes for the Soviet experiment, which seemed to many European intellectuals a positive alternative to the bourgeois democracies of their own countries. His admiration for the Soviet Union was stoked by a year-long sabbatical in Moscow (1925–1926), which he spent editing the mathematical notes of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. He summarized his observations of Soviet society in a book, *Vom Russland der Gegenwart* [reviews appear in microfilm Section A 3.; sections of the book were serialized in many German papers as “Russische Eindrücke,” found in microfilm Section B 2., Vol. II]. A second trip to Russia, in the winter of 1931–1932, disappointed him, since the experiment was showing signs of failure. By the late 1930s, Stalinism’s excesses, particularly the Moscow show trials and the manipulation of the German Communist party, had shattered his faith in the Soviets.⁸

It was in the realm of domestic political affairs that Gumbel made his mark in Germany. Gumbel was the single most thorough and best-known chronicler of political murder and political terror organizations in Germany. Using court records, newspaper accounts, and reports fed to him by friends in government, he wrote several books and dozens of articles exposing the extensive network of individuals and groups that carried out a campaign of murder (like that of the Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau in 1922), attempted murders, beatings, and kidnapping [see Bibliography in the Introduction, p. vii and microfilm Section B 2., Vol. I]. The terror was part of a right-wing effort to undermine the Weimar Republic by frightening its supporters. In these writings, Gumbel boldly named assassins and their accomplices, as well as the elite figures who ordered and planned the crimes and the financial backers of the individuals and organizations that conducted the terror. All of this pointed to the pronounced anti-Republican, anti-socialist, anti-pacifist, and anti-Semitic slant of the constabulary, judicial, and penal systems in Germany. The shocking evidence was marshalled in his summary of his findings on political murder: 354 murders committed by the right from 1919–1922 were punished with a total of 90 years and one sentence of life in prison (326 of them went unpunished

⁶Quoted from an unidentified acquaintance of Gumbel’s in a report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, dated 6/5/43, in Gumbel’s FBI file, 100-9399-23, p. 4.

⁷E. J. Gumbel, “Rede an Spartacus,” *Die Weltbühne* XIV (51), 19 December 1918, pp. 569–70.

⁸Gumbel to Willi Eichler, 5 March 1938, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (Bonn), Bestand ISK/IJB, Box 35.

years and one sentence of life in prison (326 of them went unpunished altogether), while the 22 murders committed by leftists were avenged by 10 executions, three life terms and 248 years in prison.⁹ Gumbel's revelations on political murder were confirmed in every point by the German Ministry of Justice in a report that Gumbel printed at his own expense in 1924 after the embarrassed government refused to publish it.¹⁰

These publications, along with Gumbel's pacifist speeches, earned him a reputation among the left as a champion of justice and apostle of peace. Many of Weimar's leading leftist intellectuals—like Carl von Ossietzky and Kurt Tucholsky—expressed their respect for his political writings and admiration for the courage of his conviction. Albert Einstein, who wrote many letters of reference for Gumbel, heaped praise on his beleaguered friend: "I respect [Gumbel] even more as a person. His political activity and his publications are sustained by a lofty ethos."¹¹ Gumbel was, in Einstein's view, "inspired by an uncompromising sense of justice. ...Men like him are indispensable if we are ever to build a sound political framework for our society."¹²

At the same time, Gumbel's activities won him the wrath of the anti-Republican right. Gumbel entered the raucous extraparliamentary political life of the Weimar Republic with several strikes against him: he was a Jew, a socialist, and a pacifist. Moreover, critics complained that his revelations about political terror and about the barely clandestine, illegal reestablishment and rearmament of the German military in the mid-1920s provided justification for the French to continue the occupation of the Rhineland.¹³ The four investigations that were begun against him for treason (each was dismissed as groundless) show the hatred his activities and publications engendered and confirm many of his charges about the anti-leftist slant of the judicial system. The inquiries turned up minimal evidence, and none of the cases ever reached court.¹⁴

⁹*Vier Jahre politischer Mord*, pp. 78, 80. [see also microfilm Sections A 1–2. and B 2., Vol. I.]

¹⁰*Denkschrift des Reichsjustizministers zu 'Vier Jahre politischer Mord'*. See pp. 5–8 for the origins of the report.

¹¹Einstein to Heidelberg Professor of Law Gustav Radbruch, 28 November 1930, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Handschriftenabteilung, Radbruch Nachlass, Hs. 3716, III.F.

¹²*Einstein on Peace*, ed. by Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden (New York, 1968), pp. 133–134.

¹³*Kösliner Zeitung*, 6 August 1924.

¹⁴Zentrales Staatsarchiv, Potsdam, 30.03, Oberreichsanwalt beim Reichsgericht, 6J50/24, 12J994/24, 7J70/25, 7J194/26.

Still, Gumbel paid dearly for his outspoken and uncompromising pacifism. Only his absence spared his life when a squad of right-wing, paramilitary soldiers arrived at his Berlin apartment one day in March 1919.¹⁵ He was bloodied by nationalist thugs a year later in Berlin as he presided at a pacifist rally at which his comrade Hellmuth von Gerlach was beaten senseless;¹⁶ Gumbel gave the subsequent lectures in Gerlach's stead.

The Gumbel Affair in Heidelberg, 1924–1932 (Microfilm Sections A 2–5 and B 2, Vols. I–III)

Emil J. Gumbel was one of the most controversial figures in the German academic world. He was named lecturer in statistics at the University of Heidelberg in 1923 and was considered by some colleagues “an unusually gifted mathematician”¹⁷ who had acquired “a truly notable position in his specialty,”¹⁸ mathematical statistics and probability. But in the summer of 1924, addressing a pacifist rally in Heidelberg, he urged the audience to rise for two minutes of silence to honor the war dead, “who, I shall not say, fell on the field of dishonor, but lost their lives in the most horrible way.”

The comment aroused a storm of protest. The allegedly unpatriotic remark was reported with indignation in journals throughout Germany. [Microfilm, Section A 2., August 1924 ff.] The Heidelberg faculty, responding to public outcry and its own sense that Gumbel had offended common (if exaggerated) feelings of national honor by “slandering the memory of the martyrs,” charged that he had failed to live up to his obligations as a university professor. Gumbel claimed his intent was to point out the horror and misery of war and not to defame the soldiers. Characteristically, he refused to personalize the matter, even though he could have made it known that he himself had lost a brother and a cousin in battle. To him, the issue boiled down to the constitutional right of free expression and the related principle of academic freedom. With only the philosopher Karl Jaspers dissenting, the faculty voted to dismiss the professor of statistics, only to be rebuffed by a minister of education who accepted a mild expression of regret from Gumbel. The professors, frustrated in repeated attempts to fire Gumbel and angered by his continued political activism, issued a

¹⁵E. J. Gumbel, “Die Geschichte eine Plünderung,” *Freie Zeitung*, 13 March 1920.

¹⁶“Die Gewalttaten in der Versammlung,” *Freiheit*, 21 February 1920.

¹⁷Alfred Grotjahn, professor of public health, Berlin, to Baden Minister of Education Willy Hellpach, 11 October 1924, Badisches Generallandesarchiv, Karlsruhe (GLA), 235/1890.

¹⁸Heidelberg Professor of History and Philosophical Faculty Dean Willy Andreas noted this comment from Emil Lederer, professor of economics at Heidelberg, in his notes from a conversation they held in November 1927; GLA, 69N/Andreas/753.

to fire Gumbel and angered by his continued political activism, issued a highly unusual public reprimand of Gumbel in May 1925, which focused less on alleged misdeeds than on his "entire personality." The report called him "an outspoken demagogue" who demonstrated "a complete lack of objectivity" and "a fundamental lack of tact," who was therefore "thoroughly unwelcome" at the university. Even Jaspers, who did not support Gumbel's removal, wrote a dissenting report only slightly less critical of the statistician.¹⁹ Thereafter, Gumbel was a social outcast among the Heidelberg professors,²⁰ who disseminated the report throughout the German press and academia, thereby assuring that no other institution would take him off their hands and ruining a promising academic career.

The Gumbel controversy in Heidelberg flared anew in 1930 when Gumbel was promoted to assistant professor by the minister of education, against the express wishes of the faculty [microfilm Section A 4., August 1930–May 1931]. The appointment coincided with a raucous and successful Nazi electoral campaign and was greeted by a vigorous and persistent protest movement by the university's student council, which was dominated by National Socialists. The students held a series of protest rallies and demonstrations against the appointment throughout the winter semester 1930–31. Students and local Nazis denounced Gumbel as a traitor and "slanderer of the national memory," peppered their speeches with distortions and threats, and condemned the socialist minister who promoted Gumbel; one of the rallies ended in a riot in the university courtyard. The minister of education finally dissolved the student union and ordered its offices vacated in January 1931. The protesters, however, emboldened by backing from the local Nazi party and growing civic support, defied the minister and the university rector by establishing a successor organization, which continued to demand Gumbel's dismissal. Most of the Heidelberg professors agreed tacitly with the aim of the demonstrations and so did little to dissuade the students. Few German scholars challenged the students' demand that only professors of proper heritage and a nationalistic outlook be permitted to teach them. The Gumbel affair, which was only the most spectacular of several such conflicts over allegedly "unfit" professors in Germany, demonstrated the rightward political drift of the German professoriate and student body and the decay of values such as academic liberty.

¹⁹"Beschuß der Philosophischen Fakultät Heidelberg vom 16. Mai 1925 in der Angelegenheit des Privatdozenten Dr. Gumbel," Appendix (pp. 281–286) of *Verschwörer*, 1984 edition. [See microfilm Sections A 2–3. for the first Gumbel affair.]

²⁰See Gumbel's speech before the investigating committee on 30 June 1932, Universitätsarchiv Heidelberg, B-3075/19.

Gumbel himself refused to give in; he would have resigned, he later said, "had I served the Republic by doing so. But...in this case it did not concern [me personally], but generally, those whom the Nazis considered other 'Gumbels'—professors faithful to the republic; therefore I felt obliged to struggle for the other supporters of the republic."²¹

The controversy subsided until May 1932, when Gumbel was quoted as saying that "the appropriate memorial for the soldier is not a scantily-clad virgin bearing a victory palm, but a single, big turnip" as a symbol of the starvation that plagued Germany during the war.²² Though he had been falsely quoted, the faculty would tolerate no more; following a swift inquiry, Gumbel was dismissed in August 1932.

Gumbel in Exile, 1932–1966

(Microfilm Sections A 6–7; B 2, Vol. IV; and C)

This devastating conclusion to his academic career in Germany had a paradoxical effect; as Gumbel put it, "The men who dismissed me saved my life."²³ Unwelcome at institutions in his native country, he gave a series of lectures at the mathematical institute of the Sorbonne during the winter semester 1932–1933. There he was safe from the Nazi thugs who surely would have seized him had he remained in Germany after January 1933, and he escaped the fate of his friend Carl von Ossietzky and many others who suffered years of maltreatment and eventual death in Nazi concentration camps. Unable to undo one of their foremost demons physically, the Nazis tried to exorcise Gumbel's spirit from Germany by banning and burning his books (his were the first thrown into the fire in Heidelberg) in May 1933²⁴ and including him among the first thirty-three Germans stripped of their citizenship in August 1933. Gumbel considered it an honor to be included in this group, for it indicated the degree to which he infuriated the National Socialists.²⁵

²¹Transcript of Radio interview on W.B.N.X., New York, 8 March 1944, UC 4/7.

²²"Das Kriegerdenkmal eine Kohlrübe," *Heidelberger Student*, 9 June 1932, p. 1. Gumbel insisted that he had said *Kriegsdenkmal*, or memorial to the war, rather than *Kriegerdenkmal*, or memorial to the soldiers.

²³"Memoiren von E. J. Gumbel. Erinnerungen eines Aussenseiters," manuscript of a speech given to Friends of German Labor, New York, 17 April 1964, UC 4/6.

²⁴Walter Engel and Wilfried Werner, "Verbrannt, verfeimt, verbannt. Autoren des Rhein-Neckar-Raums unter dem NS-Regime. Biographische Notizen," in *Bücherverbrennung. Zensur, Verbot, Vernichtung unter dem Nationalsozialismus in Heidelberg*, ed. Joachim-Felix Leonhard (Heidelberg, 1983), p. 149.

²⁵See Gumbel's autobiography in his *Freie Wissenschaft. Ein Sammelbuch aus der deutschen Emigration* (Strasbourg: Sebastian-Brant Verlag, 1938), p. 268.

Gumbel was active in refugee aid and exile politics in Paris and in Lyon, where he moved in 1934 to fill a post at the university. In Paris Gumbel served as an informal adviser to the juridical service of the exile section of the DLM, and in Lyon as director of the refugee aid committee; both organizations tried to help German exiles obtain work and residency permits. The Lyon group also organized social, cultural, and educational programs for German and, after March 1938, Austrian refugees. Gumbel wrote several articles and edited a book, *Freie Wissenschaft*, about the Nazi purge of the German professoriate and the pseudoscience practiced by Nazi professors. [See Bibliography in the Introduction.] He penned numerous articles for French and German emigré publications, urging the German political parties and splinter groups to put aside their differences and to unite to oppose the Nazis. He worked closely with the writer Heinrich Mann and other independent intellectuals in the German "Popular Front" (*Volksfront*) discussions in Paris in 1935–1938, in which German emigré organizations, parties, and intellectuals tried to establish an anti-Fascist front. In 1936, Gumbel submitted a proposal to the *Volksfront* in which he outlined plans for ruling Germany in the first six months after the overthrow of Hitler.²⁶ The proposal got caught up in the bickering that eventually caused the collapse of the discussions and was not adopted. In his last years in France, Gumbel devoted himself less to politics than to scholarly work, as the opportunity for meaningful political action waned and the threat of war loomed.

Gumbel and his family became naturalized French citizens in 1939, which spared them internment when war began in Europe in September 1939 and again when Germany invaded France in May 1940. (Gumbel had married Marie Luise Czettritz, a divorcée and the daughter of a German general, in 1930. Her son from her first marriage and her mother lived with them.) The Gumbels fled to Marseille when the Germans approached. Since Gumbel faced immediate deportation into the hands of the Nazi SS, he escaped to Portugal, and from there he sailed to the United States in October 1940. His family, in less immediate peril, returned to Lyon when the Germans withdrew, then joined him in America the following year.

Once in New York, Gumbel joined many fellow refugee scholars who had been hired temporarily by the New School for Social Research. Gumbel and his family became naturalized U.S. citizens shortly after the conclusion of World War II.

²⁶"Antworten: E. J. Gumbel" in *Neue Weltbühne* XXXII (41), 8 October 1936, p. 1304. [Microfilm B 2., Vol. IV.]

During the war, Gumbel joined several emigré organizations and wrote many articles exhorting his fellow refugees to support the war effort. He put his political experience to use by writing reports in 1944–1945 on the origins and development of the Nazi party and on Nazi influence in various European countries [microfilm section C.] for the U.S. Government's Office of Strategic Services. Like most German exiles in the United States, who were regarded as enemy aliens, Gumbel, too, found few opportunities for meaningful political engagement.

After World War II, Gumbel's political activism waned. He was affiliated with several pacifist and human rights groups, lobbied against the rearmament of Germany in the 1950s,²⁷ and joined a committee at Columbia University to oppose the Vietnam war in the mid-1960s, but for the last twenty years of his life devoted himself primarily to scholarly work. The political culture of his adopted country remained mysterious to him, and distance from his native country prevented him from engaging in affairs there.

Furthermore, Gumbel faced a precarious professional and financial situation in the United States, leaving him little time for political activity. Age and a controversial political past hindered his attempts to find permanent employment either in academia or in government, despite the respect that his research earned him in scientific circles.²⁸ Moreover, since his assets had been seized by the Nazis, his financial situation was never secure. He taught at several institutions in the New York area, finally landing a stable, part-time position at Columbia University in 1953. In the 1950s and 1960s Gumbel spent several semesters as a guest lecturer at the universities of Berlin and Hamburg, and he gave scholarly discourses at institutes throughout Europe; he also went on a lecture tour in Southeast Asia and the Pacific in 1960 [microfilm section E 6.].

Despite the difficulty of landing a secure job in the United States, Gumbel was a productive and successful scientist. He received many grants and contracts from governmental agencies and published scores of articles on the statistical theory of extreme values and its application to engineering problems. For example, he established methods for calculating the worst flood possible for a particular body of water and for identifying the weakest link in a chain. His theory of flood probability was used by civil engineers to build dams and in other projects in several states, and his work was utilized

²⁷See his letter, with several other signatories, to the *New York Times*, 14 July 1952, and to other newspapers in July 1952.

²⁸See "Recent comments on Gumbel's work" in the Gumbel file in Alvin Johnson's papers at Yale University Library.

in numerous applied sciences and engineering.²⁹ His scholarly books and articles are cited frequently even today, over thirty years after the publication of his crowning work, *Statistics of Extremes* (New York, 1958).³⁰

Mixed with this professional achievement was some personal adversity. His wife, Marie Luise Gumbel, died in 1952 after several years of failing health. Also, Gumbel was all but forgotten as a political figure in his native country. No German university offered him a permanent appointment, and the guest lectureships were for scientific, not political subjects. This disappointed him, for he believed that his experiences and expertise as an anti-Nazi could have been instructive to the youth of the German Federal Republic. After several fruitless attempts to issue updated versions of old books on political terror, he published a summary of his earlier work in his last book on a political subject, *Vom Fememord zur Reichskanzlei*.

Emil J. Gumbel died of cancer on September 10, 1966, at the age of seventy-five. He left behind a notable political and scientific bibliography and a legacy as one of the first people to recognize the many political dangers confronting Germany in the 1920s, particularly National Socialism. He was the first professor dismissed from his chair because of Nazi pressure. Upon his death, a friend said that Gumbel left his friends and acquaintances "personally enriched and left the world, that he had traveled so widely and knew so well, a slightly better place to live in. Would that we had more Gumbels."³¹

**Arthur Brenner
Leo Baeck Institute**

²⁹L. Harrison Layton spoke of their trip in his eulogy for Gumbel, 13 September 1966, a manuscript of which was found inside a copy of *Vom Fememord zur Reichskanzlei* in Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

³⁰Based on a search of the Science Citation Index (Compact Disc edition) for 1987 and 1988.

³¹L. Harrison Layton, op cit.

REEL INDEX

Reel 1

“Eitelkeitsbücher”

(scrapbooks containing clippings about Emil J. Gumbel)

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- 00001 A 1. Clippings, July 1916–April 1924.
- 00221 A 2. Clippings, April–October 1924.
- 00434 A 2a. Clippings, January–August 1925.
- 00466 A 3. Clippings, October 1925–April 1928.
- 00602 A 4. Clippings, April 1928–April 1931.

Reel 2

“Eitelkeitsbücher” cont.

- 00001 A 5. Clippings, May 1931–April 1933.
- 00253 A 6. Clippings, May 1933–July 1940.
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- 00001 B 1a. Gumbel's own index to his articles, 1916–1932
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Reel 4

Political writings by Emil J. Gumbel cont.

B 2. Political articles cont.

- 00001 Vol. III: Political articles, 1928–1932.
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00179 C 2. "Die deutschen Militärbunde 1919–1923" (The German military societies, 1919–1923) [probably August 1944].
00375 C 3. List of a thousand early Nazis [September 1944].
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00431 C 5. "Die Einstellung der NSDAP zum politischen Terror" (The attitude of the NSDAP toward political terror) [June 1945].
00510 C 6. Nazi influence in European countries (introduction) [circa July 1945].
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00787 C 11. Fragments and notes: "Contents of 2 records - disarmament."

Frame #

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- 00836 D 2. Postcards (7) from Kurt Goldziher to Emil J. Gumbel, November 8, 1932 to August 21, 1939.
- 00852 D 3. Letter from M. Bertillon to Emil J. Gumbel, November 2, 1942.
- 00855 D 4. "The Home Front in Germany" [essay, n.d.].
- 00863 D 5. "Japan" [incomplete essay, n.d.].
- 00872 D 6. "Report on a Scientific Trip to East Asia" [circa 1960].
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- 00426 E 1-12. "Verzeichnis" (List) [Totenliste des Dritten Reiches]
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- 00760 E 2-6. "Berliner Bombenschlag" (Berlin bombing attack).
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[German and French press clippings by month,
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- 00001 E 3-1. February 1933.
- 00010 E 3-2. March 1933.
- 00023 E 3-3. April 1933.
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- 00258 E 3-9. October 1933.
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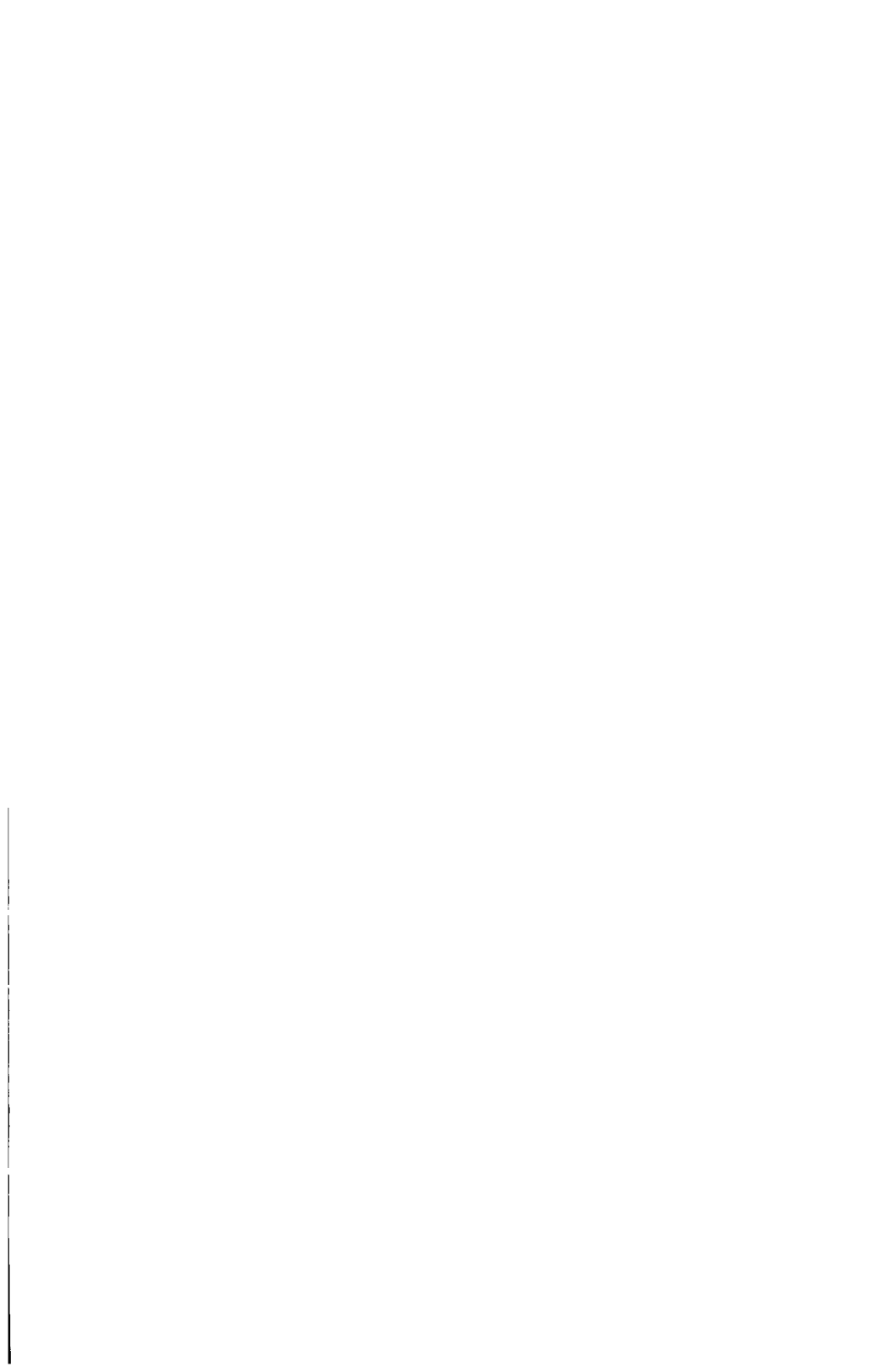
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00469 E 3-10. November 1933.
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00001 E 4-1. Terror and Prosecution of Justice in the Third Reich.
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Lichtenstein).
00235 E 4-3. University of Heidelberg, 550th Jubilee, 1936.



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