

Weil, Patrick. *How To Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789*. Trans. Catharine Porter. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008. 438 pp. ISBN: 978-0822343318.

Reviewed by
Janine Hartman
University of Cincinnati

It is one of the ironies of modernity, particularly in European societies, that the transmutation of resident population to active civil identity as a citizen is trumpeted as progress, and in practice codified and qualified to something considerably less. Patrick Weil's archival study of the invention and codification of French identity deservedly won the François Furet prize (France, 2003) as well as the H-So-Zu-Kult list prize for best new book in modern history (Germany 2004). This important work is a primer to the reasoning of the notables upon naturalization, immigration, and the limits of political expression from the Jacobins to the current political disputes about Moslems and citizenship. It is particularly useful in comparison of French and German legal thought.

Frequently works on identity draw upon theory or an analysis of literary texts to produce a set of operating assumptions about the governing *mentalité* but Weil's work is based upon primary sources, the texts and bureaucratic correspondence of those lawyers and politicians who drafted and interpreted laws which constitute a basic sense of French nationality for the state, from the Ancien Regime to the Fifth Republic. No united archive exists, nor was there even a concerted effort to produce a French code of nationality until the Vichy regime. Weil relies upon an aggregate of ministry papers, autobiography, letters, and direct contact (including an interview with the surviving SS lawyer who vetoed Vichy's planned legislation in 1940) to trace the development of consciousness about what is French legal identity and full citizenship.

Scholars familiar with decolonization are aware that French laws concerning the full naturalization of Arabs, and especially Algerian Jews were reactive to political enthusiasm, frequently racially based, and then went to a default devolution into anti-Semitism. Varying naturalization codes also periodically deprived Frenchwomen who married foreigners of natal citizenship, sometimes even while the foreigner was naturalized. In the twentieth century certain restrictions were relaxed to revive French depleted population levels after the slaughter of World War I. But after the fall of France in 1940 the Pétain regime was determined to "regenerate" France, mollify "the occupying power," and punish Gaullists and other Resistance groups by defining them outside Frenchness in a code that excluded Jews and foreigners and made dissidents

stateless individuals, much as Thomas Mann, the liberal novelist, was excluded from German citizenship after 1933.

Reactionary politicians and lawyers sought to expurgate France's diverse past, especially liberal and radical egalitarian versions dating to the Third Republic by designating a menu of attributes or accomplishments that permitted a foreigner to become French, or a Frenchman to remain French. Weil details an illuminating debate among various political and juridical elements of the Laval government about the terms, and limits, of offering foreigners French naturalization, a harbinger to the debate concerning criterion for depriving Jewish naturalized French citizens, and by extension natal French Jews, of citizenship. The internal discussion, anthropological, racial, or ideological, ran three ways and appears to have annoyed the Gestapo, but produced only individual decisions, not sweeping laws. Vichy did withdraw nationality from 446 French persons who had left France between May and June 1940 without government permission, confiscated their property, and abrogated previous French citizenship for 110,000 Algerian Jews. All parties agreed that a "hierarchy of 'assimilable races'" existed but could not effectively define that during the war, though mass deportations to Germany proceeded with little procedural complaint, unless individuals had political connections.

After the Liberation, the new government nullified all Vichy legislation and revisited naturalization cases but during the Cold War naturalization dossiers could be examined for "membership in a political party, sympathy for an extremist ideology, or professional activities directed towards political ends" (147). Sometimes efforts were made to denaturalize labor leaders, especially those born in Eastern bloc countries. French law, unlike German law, has "resulted in legislation that retained at each stage quite diverse modes of attribution of nationality, often borrowed from the provinces, or from abroad, *without abandoning any of them*. When one became the dominant principle the others were not given up, and could thus be reactivated if legislative adaptations proved necessary" (249). Elements of blood, paternity, geography, language, and culture were invoked or ignored to define or deny Frenchness and citizenship as political will shifted within the state through to the twenty-first century. The right to name citizens and what that means is now complicated by European Union membership and challenged by the centuries-old accumulation of bureaucratic symbolisms and convenient mutabilities that complicate the lives of Frenchmen and women of African and Arab descent. The prior facility of redefinition of standards and procedures for naturalization, citizenship and residency, and by definition, the rights of the natal French, gives one pause when contemplating current debates. Professor Weil has done all students of French ethnicity and politics a great service in producing this meticulous study.