

# COLLOQUIUM

## Enrico Fermi: The Pope of Physics

**Gino Segre and Bettina Hoerlin**

University of Pennsylvania

**January 25, 2017**

4:00 p.m. - Wilson Hall, One West

Enrico Fermi was unique in a number of ways, including the staggering breadth of his research, from relativity theory and magnetohydrodynamics to instrument development. He was the only 20th century physicist to have attained the very heights of the profession as a theorist and experimentalist as well as the only one to be essentially self-taught. His 1938 Nobel Prize was picked up en route in his flight from fascist Italy with his Jewish wife and children to find a new life in America. He became in 1942 the lead scientist in producing the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction, a critical precursor to the building of the atomic bomb. His role in the success of the Manhattan Project was key.

This lecture combines Fermi's personal life with his scientific contributions and illustrates how he was shaped by history and how he, in turn, shaped history. Legendarily "apolitical," Fermi was unavoidably pulled into the American political world during wartime and postwar time. The many dramas physicists faced at those times, and the particular ones immigrants encountered, are still relevant today.