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The Model Mentor

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My first encounter with Alfred was rather accidental. Little did my undergraduate self twenty-five years ago know how much this professor with the moustache would influence my journey into academia. Little did I know back then that I would actually become interested in American studies, let alone pursue an academic career. I was passionate about the theater and all I really cared about were the performing arts, the more experimental the better. One day, my friend, asked me to join one of her classes; it was American Avantgardes, taught by Alfred. In this class, which I was allowed to join as guest, Alfred took us on a tour de force of American experiments with form and aesthetics in literature, art, and performance. This was my entryway, first, to American studies, and, second, transnational American studies, this vast interdisciplinary and exciting field of research which has informed my work in obvious and less obvious ways ever since.

I assume that many contributors to this birthday section already mentioned is enormous achievements, from his position as editor in chief of this journal for the past four years, his decades-long participation in the executive group organizing the International Autobiography Association (IABA), his presidency of MESEA (The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas) from 2000–2004 and of German Association for American Studies from 2002–2005, his position as general editor of the journal *Amerikastudien/American Studies*—a position he held for more than thirty years—and as general editor of *American Studies, a Monograph Series* (published with Universtitätsverlag Winter in Heidelberg, Germany) from 1991 to 2002, his membership in the Academia Europaea: The Academy of Europa since 2014, his impressive and most diverse publications ranging from a broad variety of topics related to transnational American studies, life writing, postmodernism, narratology and interculturality to monographs on individual Americans like Jack London or Al Capone, and the recognition of his outstanding achievements in American studies in form of the Carl Bode-Norman Holmes Pearson Prize in 2013, awarded to American studies luminaries like Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Gloria

E. Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, Paul Lauter, Sacvan Berovitch, Janice Radway, Lisa Lowe, and Shelley Fisher Fishkin before and after him.

All these achievements are more than impressive and well documented on his CV. What is missing from his CV, however, is the work he did for others. Although I have never been his student, doctoral candidate or assistant; nonetheless he supported me in my academic journeys in many ways. And I think this already says a lot about Alfred's personality as an academic: he cares; and he cares in particular about early career scholars. I cannot precisely say how many undergraduate students he enabled to spend a year abroad, how many PhD candidates and postdocs he supported by sharing his expertise and providing them access to his networks. In this regard, Alfred became my role model. The model mentor. This is the most important lesson I learned from Alfred: to care for younger scholars. I have seldom met a professor who pro-actively and with great dedication and success made "early career support" a top priority in the same manner Alfred did. No matter how busy, he has always agreed to review, read, give feedback, and think of ways to support. He is not only genuinely interested in and appreciates good research by young scholars, but he takes the effort to translate this interest and appreciation into relentless support. Young scholars depend on and need mentors like him. Thank you, Alfred, for being a model mentor – to me and so many others. Happy Birthday, dear Alfred!