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Wagons, Ho!
US Route 80

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In all the years that I have known him, in all the countless conversations that we have shared, I haven't been able to teach Alfred Hornung *anything*. If I mention going to a place like Oaxaca, he's already been there; I say "Alaska," and his book on Jack London is coming out; I bring him a small Native American handicraft from Montana, and he reaches up to his mantel to put it amongst the many examples of Indigenous art already on display there; we go wine-tasting and while I can't decide what I like, he's arranging for a case to be put in the trunk of his car. I go to London to give a talk, and he—already the winner of many awards—soon arrives to accept his honorary membership in the elite Academia Europaea. It doesn't matter whether we are speaking of his travels and tastes, his expertise and his experience, or his reputation and scholarship—Alfred has no equal and the rest of us, like fans lined up outside a concert hall, collectively and enthusiastically applaud his wisdom, creativity, and elegant candor. We cheer him on—our fearless leader. Working alongside Alfred as coeditors of the *Routledge Companion to Transnational American Studies* as well as on the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, as an Obama Institute Fellow, and as a co-committee member of the American Studies Association's International Committee has been one of the highlights of my own career, and I'm lucky now to have this opportunity to express my gratitude for his care, friendship, and mentorship, as well as to think about his global influence. Alfred is one of the world's reigning figures in our field—arguably, and without a doubt in my view, *the most important transnational Americanist of our time*—a distinction he earns, in part, because he is there before anyone else, opening the door to new conceptualizations and ambitious projects, to new research and international relationships, but also to second chances and creative forms of support, to friendship and alliances with kindred spirits (ok, yes, I am referring to beer here).



Image credit:
N. Morgan

Alfred Hornung is a "pioneer" in the true spirit of the word; he is a visionary leader, an optimist, and in any group, he is always the one who finds a way forward. If there's another career waiting in the wings for Alfred, I strongly suggest international diplomacy as Alfred would make the perfect Ambassador. As he has long demonstrated in the academic-political sphere of the Obama Institute, a vision he turned to reality through his incredible work ethic and ability to bring out the best in others, Alfred teaches a form of intellectual hospitality which we would all do well to study.

In addition to dozens of edited volumes (which he also generously carries to conferences as gifts), research papers, conference papers, journal publications, books and chapters, Alfred Hornung's research has been pioneering in his discoveries, such as his ground-breaking work on the transnational influence of Confucius on the Founding Fathers' conceptualization of American democracy. When Alfred gave a lecture on this research at my university in Georgia, it was beyond enlightening for my

students and colleagues to be given substantial evidence *in the American political context* and across the literary spectrum of the assertion that their own inheritance of the intellectual projects of humanism and democracy had been millennia in the making, the products of the world's best minds whose ideas are preserved for us via shared languages. Significantly, Alfred's analysis demonstrates that American Exceptionalism was not at the *intellectual* heart of the American project. The description that Alfred offered of the profound hope inspired in the American founders who turned to philosophy outside the European tradition underlined for me the insight that Alfred once shared with me about our field: that there are more experts on the United States outside the US than inside the US. I've repeated this observation often, and while it may seem statistically obvious, it's an important check on the United States as an object of study defined by insiders; in fact, Americans of this century must now also look beyond our borders, with profound perhaps desperate hope, to scholars and philosophers outside, to preserve the historical and cultural record with intellectual rigor as the Smithsonian Institute and eight of its museums in Washington, DC, as well as our national parks are decurated and their websites are redacted with "content corrections" to celebrate American exceptionalism by decree of the current regime. In the face of such power plays, some might think that academia is weak; again, this is where Alfred's leadership and vision shine. As the speaker of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies, with his amazing family of friends and fellow scholars, he has managed to secure an institutional space outside the US to ensure a tradition of teaching and scholarship that sustains critical inquiry and nurtures new talents that are elsewhere exploited if not totally downtrodden. I'm personally grateful to have had the honor of being invited to the Obama Institute as a fellow.

Alfred is busy, and his presence is wanted far and wide; no matter where he goes—China, the USA, Japan, city after city across Europe—he carries with him an ethic of "inclusive collaboration." I remember the first time I saw Alfred; I was new to the American Studies Association. I read in the program that there was a meeting of the International Committee scheduled at a certain time and place, so I decided to attend. In fact, I attended year after year, joining in the conversation, clueless to the fact that I was not actually a member of the committee and that such meetings, though publicly announced, were truly for members only. No doubt Alfred (and Udo Hebel and the rest of our international friends) enjoyed waiting for the penny to drop but never let on. Instead, I was included and in time I became a proud member of the committee, even leading it for a short time myself, along with Udo Hebel's wife, Birgit Bauridl, and fellow *JTAS* editor and poet Jennifer Reimer. That permission of allowing people to join, of letting others be who they are—or become who they are, as Nietzsche would have it—is part of Alfred's modus operandi and species being. It's in his nature to let others join the long wagon trail to a shared destination. Trekking around the world regularly, he is the first to make sacrifices to get the work done, even in the least glamorous scenarios—such as staying at my house for days, sitting across the dining room table day after day, reviewing and editing together, only sustained by cookies

and the distant promise of having a buffalo steak (his pioneer favorite, of course) for dinner.

For me, these bonds forged through shared time and effort, sealed by laughter and shared thoughts, are the quiet, personal, and irreplaceable rewards of our unique and special journey as professors, as friends. I can only imagine how many of us would actually hop aboard a wagon or saddle up if Alfred, our hero, were leading the way, hollering "Wagons Ho!" lighting out across the US—and life in general—on Route 80.

Happy 80th, Dearest and Much Adored Alfred!