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Alfred Hornung

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It is now some twenty years since I first met Alfred Hornung. When I first heard his name, I immediately thought of Paul Hornung, the American football star running back of the 1950s and 1960s, who was nicknamed "The Golden Boy." So from the beginning, in my own thoughts at least, Alfred Hornung was also a Golden Boy!

I first got to know Alfred through the International Committee of the American Studies Association. I remember that at one of the early IC meetings, Alfred mentioned that he was involved in the ASA International Initiative Website, which covered American studies journals worldwide, and proposed developing the International Committee site to include overseas book series dealing with American studies. As a (still) junior scholar working outside the United States, who was outraged by the myopia of American Studies scholars in the USA who refused to pay attention to what was produced outside (especially in foreign languages), I was tremendously impressed by Alfred's commitment to publicizing and engaging with work in American studies from throughout the world.

It was not long after this that Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Shirley Geok-Lin Lim had the idea to start the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*. Alfred was one of the prodigiously talented team of senior scholars who made up the editorial board. *JTAS* well exemplified Alfred's championing of American Studies scholarship across borders. I was invited by the editorial board to take an intermediate role as editor of the journal's *Forward* Section. Within a year or two, I was absorbed into the editorial board with the others. It was great for me to get to work on an equal basis with Alfred and the other eminent figures on the board.

A turning point in my relations with Alfred came in fall 2014, when he invited me to attend the founding conference of the newly launched Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany, (actually, the name "Obama center" was still unofficial. Alfred explained to me that

the university was reluctant to dedicate the center name while Barack Obama was still in office, in case he did something horrific before leaving office. So I suggested jokingly that they name the center instead after the town of Obama, Japan).

The conference was a revelation. Alfred's powerful reputation attracted a wide range of scholars and other participants from both Germany and the United States—including Barack Obama's half-sister Auma Obama, a former university student in Germany. Alfred commented on papers and put scholars together. I got to meet and hang out with many distinguished figures, among them Carla L. Peterson, Laura Stevens, Oliver Scheidung, and Udo J. Hebel (I also met and spoke with some graduate students, including an MA student named Daniel Schaefer, who remains a friend). Although I lost most of one day to illness, it was a richly nourishing experience overall.

Indeed, the conference was such a wonderful experience that I expressed to Alfred the hope that I could come back sometime and meet him and his colleagues at the Obama Institute. Alfred mentioned that they were putting together a program of visiting fellows. I said immediately that I was on sabbatical that year, so if they were interested in having me as a visiting scholar, now was the time to get me.

I am sure that between working with students and starting out the new center, the very last thing Alfred needed was more work traversing the bureaucracy and setting things up to get me an invitation. Somehow, he made it happen, and in the space of six months, at the beginning of May 2015, I was arriving in Mainz for a monthlong residence as Obama fellow. I don't know how Alfred moved so many mountains, but he arranged funding, housing, and lecture dates. I was deeply touched and grateful for this act of friendship and professional respect. Alfred even came personally to meet me the first day and take me to my hotel.

The next month passed like a dream. Through Alfred's management, I got to meet and interact with the various faculty members in the orbit of the Obama Institute, and several of them invited me to speak in their classes. It was a great treat to visit Mita Banerjee's class on medical humanities and speak about the Japanese American author Miné Okubo and her career as an illustrator of medical textbooks for Springer Verlag. I also spoke in Axel R. Schäfer's class about Eleanor Roosevelt, and in Birgit Wetzel-Sahm's class. Meanwhile, Alfred encouraged Americanist colleagues at other institutions to invite me to lecture. Florian Freitag kindly invited me to take part in a workshop on Louisiana culture at the Germersheim campus of Johannes Gutenberg University and I also went to Regensburg to speak at the European American Forum there. One particular honor was being invited by Christa Buschendorf to speak to her class at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, on the dilemmas of abolitionism in the 1850s. It was the last term before she retired, so I felt the historical occasion. In fact, Johannes Völz, who attended the talk, proceeded to invite me to return to Frankfurt to address his class.

Throughout my time in Mainz, Alfred treated me as an honored guest. He let me go through the collection of American studies volumes whose publication he had directed and choose some titles for myself. I also noticed the camaraderie he had with

everyone around him. I remember going along with him and his students to a beer hall, and also Alfred and his wife taking me and my husband to drink wine at a vineyard. Alfred also encouraged the younger scholars and students to consult me and make use of my time. It was thus that I first met Sabine Kim, who became my friend and professional collaborator in her own right. Perhaps the only disappointing thing for me about the trip was that I had hoped to have a chance to improve my rusty German during my time in Mainz. However, Alfred and all the other American studies scholars were extremely fluent in English and were glad to practice the language with me!

In sum, Alfred Hornung is a model of a generous and forward-looking scholar who has helped shape the field of transnational American studies. His commitment to internationalizing the field and to supporting younger scholars has been a powerful influence on me.