

Farewell to Berndt Ostendorf - a brilliant scientist, great university teacher and dear friend

On October 18, 2024, Prof. Dr. Berndt Ostendorf, Professor Emeritus of American History, died - just a few days before the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Amerika-Institute at LMU Munich, which he headed for a quarter of a century.

I met Berndt in the summer of 1988 when I had just returned from the USA and was looking for a place where I could study American history in Germany. Berndt got me so excited about the Amerika-Institute (AI) that I stayed there right away - for over 20 years. A decision I have never regretted. My time at the AI in Munich was one of the best of my life, and Berndt played no small part in that. He was a great academic teacher, mentor and friend. He always encouraged and supported me, encouraged me to do my habilitation, gave me the sofa in his office to change my children's nappies, introduced me to the Erasmus network and the OAH, awakened in me a love of New Orleans and much, much more.

Berndt, who took over the management of the Amerika-Institute in 1979, was one of the pioneers of American cultural history in Germany. He rendered outstanding services in this function. His research focused on the areas of cultural and social history. He was particularly enthusiastic about the topics of immigration, civil society, multiculturalism, African American history, American music (especially jazz), popular culture and the history and culture of the city of New Orleans. He has published great works in all these areas and, through his work on the board of the DGFA and the BAA, has contributed significantly to the modernization of American Studies in Germany. In addition, he very actively promoted academic exchange at all levels - both for students and teachers - and networked German research on America with that in other European countries and in the USA.

As an academic teacher, Berndt impressed his students with his comprehensive education and professional expertise. He was always ready to respond to all our questions and interests and to encourage them whenever possible. As his research assistant and habilitation candidate, I appreciated him as a generous, fair boss and supervisor who gave me a lot of freedom and always encouraged me along the way.

Colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic who knew Berndt speak of him with the highest esteem. He was not only a great scientist, but also a life-loving, positive and kind person with a great sense of humor. All those who had the privilege of working with Berndt and of being his friend will always remember him with affection and gratitude.

Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson