

Wilfried Raussert, Olaf Kaltmeier (eds.)

InterAmerican Perspectives in the 21st Century

Festschrift in Honor of Josef Raab

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**InterAmerican Perspectives
in the 21st Century**

Festschrift in Honor of Josef Raab

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Introduction

WILFRIED RAUSSERT

This book is in honor and memory of Josef Raab, a dedicated scholar, an academic leader, an intellectual with a clear vision, a mentor with a warm-hearted personality, and a good friend to many of us. Sadly, Josef Raab left us on November 10th 2019 after a long struggle with severe health issues. This book includes his own inspiring writing and extends his academic vision of InterAmerican Studies by bringing together new scholarly work in the field. Most of the contributors are close companions who worked intensively with him during his academic career.

Josef Raab was among the first in German American Studies to recognize the need to think North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean in relation and dialogue. His academic career in a way predestined his hemispheric approach to the Americas. After a solid German academic education at the Catholic University of Eichstätt with several stays abroad in England, Spain, and France, he completed MA and PhD programs at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. His California experience with additional teaching stints in Texas brought him into close contact with Chicano literature and cultures and paved the way for a deep interest in interAmerican border studies. Together with his mentor Roland Hagenbüchle and in collaboration with Marietta Messmer, he edited the two volume project *Negotiations of America's National Identity* in 2000 and, around the same time, completed his post-doctoral study *Borderlands of Identity in Mexican American Literature* with his habilitation at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt.

He brought his intercultural competence into the fabric of Bielefeld University during his professorship from 2000 until 2004 and nourished the vision of future Inter-American Studies in collaboration with Sebastian Thies and other colleagues at Bielefeld University. The MA program InterAmerican Studies at Bielefeld University started in the fall of 2006 when Josef was already chair of American Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen (2004–2019). He returned to Bielefeld for several interdisciplinary and bilingual conferences at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF): “E Pluribus Unum: Ethnic Identities in Transnational Integration Processes in the Americas” (2005), “Of Fatherlands and Motherlands: Gender and Nation in the Americas/De Patrias y Matrias: Género y nación en las Américas” (2006), and “ImagiNations/ImagiNaciones: Documentaries and the Narration of Nation in the Americas: El cine documental y la narración de la nación en las Américas” (2008). With the ZiF group “E Pluribus Unum” (coordinated by him, Olaf Kaltmeier, and Sebastian Thies), he continued his dialogue with the growing field of InterAmerican Studies at Bielefeld University and advanced the cause of hemispheric American Studies. As the Founding President of the International Association of Inter-American Studies (2009), he welcomed

forum for inter-american research (fiar), the online journal founded by Wilfried Raussert, his successor as chair of American Studies at Bielefeld University, as the official bilingual journal of the International Association of Inter-American Studies. In 2011, he attended the opening conference of the Center for InterAmerican Studies (CIAS) that was co-founded by Olaf Kaltmeier and Wilfried Raussert, and continued working closely with the CIAS and the members of the Advisory Board of the International Association of Inter-American Studies. Together, they have expanded a network of scholars around the globe that would develop new paradigms, concepts, and visions for InterAmerican Studies and turn them into a prospering field of scholarship and dialogue.

From 2008 until 2019, Josef Raab was chief editor (with Olaf Kaltmeier and Sebastian Thies) of the series *Inter-American Studies/Estudios interamericanos* at WVT/Bilingual Press (now WVT/UNO Press) which has brought forth more than 30 volumes dedicated to inter-American scholarship since 2008. He also joined the editorial group of the Routledge series *InterAmerican Research: Contact, Communication, Conflict* launched by Olaf Kaltmeier and Wilfried Raussert in 2015. He continued working with colleagues from Bielefeld and international scholars in the project Entangled Americas that was funded by the Federal Ministry of Research and Education (BMBF) from 2013–2019. As co-editor, in spite of his severe illness and with great spirit, he managed to complete *The Routledge Handbook to the History and Society of the Americas* that was published in the spring of 2019 as part of the Entangled Americas project.

Josef Raab was among the key figures in the hemispheric turn within the discipline of American Studies in Germany that has led to the founding of a number of new research centers, including, among others, the Center for InterAmerican Studies at Bielefeld University (Germany), the Center for the Americas at the University of Groningen (The Netherlands), the Center for the Americas at the University of Graz (Austria), and the Center for Inter-American Studies at the University of Innsbruck (Austria). In addition, France has established a nation-wide research institute called Institut des Amériques in 2007, and, on a global scale, this approach has found its most visible representation in the founding of the International Association of Inter-American Studies in 2009.

In one of our last personal conversations with Josef Raab, when we visited him in his home in April 2019, we addressed pending issues and future challenges for Inter-American Studies. The field faces new tests in contemporary times of crisis that manifest themselves throughout the Americas. The United States of America have turned into a deeply divided and conflicted society, not only between Republicans and Democrats. Mexico is struggling hard to overcome the ongoing violence and corruption of the drug war and narcopolitics. Protests in Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil reflect deep economic crisis, political shifts from left to right, and demonstrate that the whole continent faces turmoil, violence, and increasing inequality. U.S. interventionism once more appears on the rise as Latin American governments face tough challenges and often seem to fail in times of crisis. These recent developments under-