

## **Witches, Cowgirls, Geeks: Images of Femininity in American Popular Culture from the Puritans to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Teacher Seminar, 8.10.2010**

**Speaker: Dr. Alexandra Ganser, FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg**

Organizer: Amerika-Haus-Bibliothek, B.A.Z. Amerika-Haus

The witch, the cowgirl, the Republican mother, the first lady, the cheerleader, the bookwormish geek, the soccer mom: these are just some examples that are commonly associated with distinct American feminine roles. Through their representations in popular culture, their appeal has spread beyond national boundaries so that today, cowgirls are no less an attraction in the German carnival than cowboys, and cheerleading has become a professional sports all across Europe. In today's seminar we will take a closer look at some of the better-known images of American femininity and their historical emergence by surveying the impact of women and women's roles in American history and by discussing exemplary representations of femininity in popular culture (popular literature, film and television, music, the internet). As a conclusion, we will also discuss together why and how to teach about "witches, cowgirls, and geeks" in our classrooms.

9 – 10:30 a.m.

- Brief historical survey of American women's history and female role models from the colonial period until today
  - the Puritan witchcraft trials
  - the ideal of Republican motherhood
  - women on the Western frontier: the schoolmarm and the cowgirl
  - politics: the first and second waves of feminism and the First Lady as a role model
  - emerging femininities: the case of the geek
- Time for Questions

10:30 – 11 a.m.

- Coffee break

11 – 12: 30 a.m.

- Audio, visual and video material on the representation of American femininity in popular culture
- Brief comments on and discussion of these materials

12: 30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

- teaching femininity: some guidelines and pitfalls to avoid (roundtable discussion from our own in-class experience)