

## First Ladies

**Teacher Seminar, 1 March 2011**  
**Speaker: Prof. Dr. Volker Depkat,**  
**Professur für Amerikanistik, Universität Regensburg**

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

Registration fee: € 10

Michelle Obama has renewed the public and scholarly interest in the history and culture of the “First Ladyship”, without which the American presidency would be incomplete. Although not institutionalized by the U.S. Constitution, the First Lady has developed into a political office of its own right in the course of time. As wife of the president, mother of his children and manager of the White House, the First Lady is a key figure in the inner circle of power playing numerous roles: confidant, comforter and supporter of the president, public figure and celebrity, the nation's social hostess, a symbol of American womanhood, advocate and champion of social causes, and many more. Moving in a constitutional grey zone, First Ladies from the start were confronted with the task of having to invent themselves as “First Ladies”, and invent themselves as “First Ladies” they did time and again. Starting with Martha Washington and currently ending with Michelle Obama, the history of the First Ladyship reveals a kaleidoscope of possible role models ranging from Martha Washington’s “Mother of the Nation” to the ostentatiously political Eleanor Roosevelt or Hillary Clinton, from fashion icon Jackie Kennedy to Barbara Bush as national grandma. Dealing with the history of the First Ladyship in America’s democracy thus not only reveals variations of female politics, it also opens up multiple paths into America’s political, popular and media culture. Drawing on a wide variety of primary material, the seminar will circumscribe the spectrum of types and possibilities by looking at a selection of First Ladies.

- 9:00            The History and Culture of the First Ladyship
- 10:30           Coffee break
- 11:00           Recent Gender Negotiations in the White House:  
                  Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush and Michelle Obama