



Nordamerikastudienprogramm  
Institut für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Keltologie

## Events | Veranstaltungen Wintersemester 2009-2010



### Martin Luther King Day Lecture 2010

## Prof. Dr. Norbert Finzsch Historisches Seminar, Universität Köln

### "David Walker and the Fight against Slavery"

Tuesday • 19 January 2010 • 6:00-8:00 p.m. • Festsaal (Hauptgebäude)

In this lecture Norbert Finzsch will focus on the importance of anti-slavery and abolitionist activities supported by free people of color before the Civil War. Whereas activities by white abolitionists have received wide attention both in popular discourses and in scholarly works since the 1960s and whereas the liberation struggle of slaves obtained increasing consideration in historical studies since the 1980s, the contribution of African American citizens who lived as free Blacks or as freedpeople in the North has been neglected to some extent. Within anti-slavery and abolitionist networks, free people of color served as an important link between enslaved brethren in the South and white supporters in the North. They worked as operatives of the Underground Railroad and helped in the proliferation of information from and to the South, using family connections and acquaintances. More important, however, was their service as intellectuals of liberation, as legitimate voices of African American resistance and resilience, as theoreticians and practitioners of discursive modes of defiance against proslavery forces in the South. The proslavery forces fought back, defining elaborate justifications of slavery that were often based on a specific reading of the scripture. It is therefore of utmost importance to understand that religious motives and theological foundations of discourses were a very important, if not the paramount thrust of Black thinking in antebellum America. I will focus on one particular writer, David Walker, and his groundbreaking pamphlet *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* and compare it with other texts written by African Americans at the end of the 1820s and at the beginning of the 1830s.

Norbert Finzsch is professor of Anglo-American History at the University of Cologne. His research focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American history, African American history, the history of sexuality, and theory and history. Professor Finzsch is the author of *Konsolidierung und Dissens: Nordamerika von 1800 bis 1865* (Münster: LIT, 2005) and *Von Benin nach Baltimore: Die Geschichte der African Americans* (with James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999). He is also co-editor of the essay collection *Atlantic Communications: The Media in American and German History from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (with Ursula Lehmkuhl, Oxford: Berg, 2004).

The lecture and discussion will be followed by a reception.