



Nordamerikastudienprogramm  
Institut für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Keltologie

## Events | Veranstaltungen Wintersemester 2009-2010



# Prof. Kathleen Donohue

## Central Michigan University / Universität Bochum

### "The Political Odyssey of F. J. Schlink: Capitalism, Communism, and Consumerism in the 1930s"

**Tuesday • 8 December 2009 • 6:00-8:00 pm**  
**Lecture Hall 17, Institut für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Keltologie**

In the early 1930s, anyone interested in consumer issues would have been familiar with the name F. J. Schlink. His articles appeared in such high-profile journals of opinion as the *Nation*, the *New Republic*, and *Common Sense*. His books were widely read and influential, *Your Money's Worth* (1927) chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs* (1933) helping to launch a national campaign to strengthen the nation's food and drug controls. He was also a co-founder of the nation's first consumer-financed, product-testing organization, Consumers' Research. So solid were Schlink's credentials as one of the nation's foremost consumer activists that in December 1933, when National Recovery Administrator Hugh Johnson found himself besieged by angry consumer activists for not doing enough for the nation's consumers, he decided that the best way to silence his critics was to offer to appoint Schlink as his advisor on consumer issues.

In the same years that Schlink was establishing his reputation as a champion of the consumer, however, he was also on a journey from the left side of the political spectrum to the right. By the mid-1930s, he had abandoned his faith in socialist solutions, becoming instead a vocal opponent of government activism and a staunch anticommunist. The particular experiences that prompted Schlink to reassess his political assumptions may have been unique. But he responded to these experiences by embracing a set of ideas that came to dominate the political landscape for much of the later twentieth century. It is important to understand why.

Kathleen Donohue is associate professor of history at Central Michigan University and a Fulbright guest professor at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum during the academic year 2009-2010. She is the author of the monograph *Freedom from Want: American Liberalism and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003) and the editor of *With Liberty and Justice for All? Rethinking Politics in Cold War America, 1945-1965* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming). Prof. Donohue is currently working on a book entitled *Information Wars: The Public's Right to Know and the Making of Modern America*.