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Buying A Bride: An Engaging History Of Mail-Order Matches



Synopsis

There have always been mail-order brides in America—but we haven't always thought about them in the same ways. In *Buying a Bride*, Marcia A. Zug starts with the so-called "Tobacco Wives" of the Jamestown colony and moves all the way forward to today's modern same-sex mail-order grooms to explore the advantages and disadvantages of mail-order marriage. It's a history of deception, physical abuse, and failed unions. It's also the story of how mail-order marriage can offer women surprising and empowering opportunities. Drawing on a forgotten trove of colorful mail-order marriage court cases, Zug explores the many troubling legal issues that arise in mail-order marriage: domestic abuse and murder, breach of contract, fraud (especially relating to immigration), and human trafficking and prostitution. She tells the story of how mail-order marriage lost the benign reputation it enjoyed in the Civil War era to become more and more reviled over time, and she argues compellingly that it does not entirely deserve its current reputation. While it is a common misperception that women turn to mail-order marriage as a desperate last resort, most mail-order brides are enticed rather than coerced. Since the first mail-order brides arrived on American shores in 1619, mail-order marriage has enabled women to improve both their marital prospects and their legal, political, and social freedoms. *Buying A Bride* uncovers this history and shows us how mail-order marriage empowers women and should be protected and even encouraged.

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: NYU Press (June 7, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0814771815

ISBN-13: 978-0814771815

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.3 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #373,596 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in Books > Law > Family Law > Marriage #593 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Marriage & Family #1550 in Books > History > World > Women in History

Customer Reviews

I received an ARC from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Great book! The author did an

excellent job with her research. I am a college history professor and this topic has always intrigued me. In fact, I spent as much time reading the footnotes and expanding on her resources as I did reading the text. The author makes compelling arguments. This book is a valuable addition to the fields of women's history and American history.

Hands up if you thought that mail-order brides were a relatively new phenomena, restricted perhaps to some Asian and eastern European countries. You would be wrong! The author of this wonderfully engaging book looks at mail-order brides from an American perspective and it has its roots deep in history, importing ladies from many countries. In earlier times it was viewed as a form of future breeding stock and necessary to bring balance to the predominantly male pioneers. When there was difficulty attracting females to be exported, it could be time to dragoon in some convicts, trick a few people or make a very, very compelling offer and promise (that may be latterly broken). Abuse, deception, trickery and failure has accompanied each successive wave of mail-order brides over time, although through adversity and trouble has also come empowerment and opportunity for some women. The author has dug into a rich seam of long-forgotten legal cases to bring this fascinating book to life. It does not hector or judge, but highlights a broad range of problems ranging from breach of contract to human trafficking and prostitution and these issues are not things consigned solely to the history books. This is a meticulously researched book that could give much to the academic researcher whilst remaining open and accessible to the casual, interested reader. It was one of those great little finds that was hard to put down, despite it being a subject that might not have ordinarily been in the middle of this reviewer's reading focus. There's not a lot more to add. If you hadn't considered this book but are open to reading something different, take a chance on it and prepare to be lost in the book for a fair few evenings!

What a fantastic, fantastic chronicle! Detailing the various experiences and accounts of mail order brides, *Buying a Bride: An Engaging History of Mail-Order Matches* digs deep and delivers a no-holds-barred narrative on a subject that has been left (until now) to modern documentaries and fan-fiction that barely scratches the surface. Going into this, I suppose I expected something a little more like "Birthday Girl", but was instead engrossed in a fascinating history dating back to the founding of the US. Despite sometimes reading like a textbook, *Buying a Bride* is a captivating study. Zug forces a conversation about the good, the bad, and the ugly, but does so with a weapon that few will be able to argue with: The truth. I'd like to thank Net Galley and the publisher, NYU

Press, for providing a copy of this book in exchange for my honest opinion, which this certainly is.

This history of "mail-order brides," or matrimonial immigration, is well-written, fast-paced, and downright fascinating. Most Western minds balk at the thought of marrying a virtual stranger based on financial exchange and lifestyle compatibility rather than love, but as Marcia A. Zug points out in *Buying a Bride*, the love match tradition is relatively new--less than a century ago, people were marrying each other for much more pragmatic reasons. The question here is, were they right, or are we? If you are a strong believer in a match based purely on love, don't be surprised if you find yourself questioning your views by the end of this thoroughly researched apology for the way things were. I received a complimentary copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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