



Buying a Bride: An Engaging History of Mail-Order Matches

Marcia A. Zug

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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.

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