

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

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We know what you're thinking: mail-order marriages involve socially challenged, disagreeable men and desperate foreign women. Well, you're partly right. Even so, the four-hundred-year history of bride buying is complicated by the early years in American history, when Jamestown Colony sought out "tobacco wives" and pioneer brides rode stagecoaches and steam trains to the uncertain pleasures of a corn-husk bed. These courageous women were admired at the time. But perceptions gradually changed after the Civil War as the racial demographics of the brides shifted to Asian and Eastern and Southern European women seeking to maneuver around America's immigration policies. So what's a concerned bystander to think? "Despite significant risks, mail-order marriages are typically beneficial and even liberating for women," says Marcia Zug, expressing a sentiment she never thought she'd write. Eye-opening and entertaining, this project deserves a large audience.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Fall 2016)

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