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L. S. Kim, **Maid for Television: Race, Class, Gender, and a Representational Economy,** Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2023, 224 pp., $38.95 (paperback).

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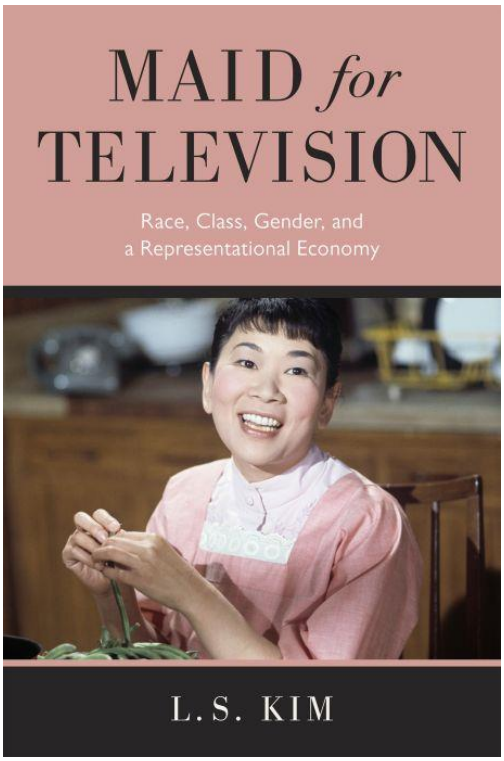

L. S. Kim, Professor in the Department of Film and Digital Media at the University of California, Santa Cruz, pursues an intertextual and historical analysis of domestic servants throughout American television in ***Maid for Television: Race, Class, Gender, and a Representational Economy***. Kim weaves together in-depth episode analyses from various television programs with overarching cultural themes to examine how race operates as a representational frame that "economizes" differences (p. 164). This analysis has meaningful implications for critical race theorists, media producers, feminist scholarship, and intersectional media studies scholars.

The book tackles the figure of the racialized domestic servant in U.S. television from the 1950s up until around the 2010s. By conceptualizing a representational economy, Kim explores how cultural production "balances" images that subvert the status quo; moments that depart from hegemonic ideals are always kept in check—ensuring that the bottom line remains White, heterosexual, middle-class, and patriarchal. Overwhelmingly, Kim's book finds that racialized domestic workers uphold Whiteness within the intimacy of the familial home, providing important precedent for race relations and social conflicts. Race is depicted through representations of difference. These "controlling images" of maids in television reinforce minorities' marginalization off-screen, as the concentration of people of color in domestic service legitimates a racial, class, and gender hierarchy (p. 18). Overall, the book examines how race, gender, and class are conveyed through the overlooked (yet highly visible) image of the maid, with each chapter interrogating a specific demographic of domestic servants; the maid serves as a conduit for broader social practices.

Chapter 2 analyzes African Americans in the role of the domestic servant in U.S. television. By examining shows like *Beulah* (p. 30), *I'll Fly Away* (p. 37), and *The Jeffersons* (p. 51), as well as hosts like Oprah Winfrey and Niecy Nash, Kim demonstrates how the Mammy figure remains highly potent, even as the exact image shifts. The Mammy's underlying message suggests that Black women are selfless vessels of service—happy to be made into whatever she needs to be. In this way, the Black female maid on sitcoms mythologizes and fictionalizes race relations, creating a world where racism does not exist, nor does it impede the seemingly harmonious relationship between White employer and Black domestic servant (p. 22). Kim argues that Black domestic servants are told as a story from the past—a term the book calls

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retrospective displacement. This suggests that racism is relegated to a prior history, thereby evading current scrutiny and comforting White audiences that race relations now are "much better than before" (p. 23). Thus, the image of Black domestic servants affirms White dominance and eases race anxieties. In an attempt to intervene on these racist tropes, Kim concludes this chapter by suggesting that media producers follow in the footsteps of *I'll Fly Away*, by writing Black characters that move beyond repeated images, ushering in new perspectives that challenge racial hierarchies.

In order for racial difference to be demarcated on television, it needs to stand in opposition to Whiteness. Whiteness, as Kim defines in chapter 3, is a place of privilege that is "rendered invisible" (p. 63). Yet there are delineations within Whiteness based on class and gender that contribute to one's potential status; there are shades of Whiteness that determine access to privilege. In this chapter, Kim explores the White domestic servant, arguing that their class status indicates them as an example of "non-ideal Whiteness or otherness" (p. 63). Examples in this chapter come from *Hazel* (p. 68), *Family Affair* (p. 75), and *The Brady Bunch* (p. 79)—prominent television sitcoms that feature a White domestic servant. These characters affirm the status of the White family they work for, emphasizing the families' place within upper economic echelons. While each White servant is more integrated into family dynamics than maids of color, they remain separate from being truly part of the family because of their class. Yet, unlike servants of color, White maids can sometimes become legitimate family members through marriage (e.g., *The Sound of Music* [p. 68]). In this way, even as White domestic servants are demonstrated as less than because of their class, they are not always othered.

In contrast to the White domestic servant, Asian American housekeepers/maids exist on television as perpetual foreigners. Their race becomes a spectacle through attire and accents. Not only is their performance raced, but Asian American servants also negotiate their roles through their sexuality; women are sexualized and exoticized, and men are desexualized and subordinated. Through an investigation of *Bonanza* (p. 98), *The Bachelor Father* (p. 105), and *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* (p. 111), chapter 4 shows how both Asian houseboys and Asian maids are represented as quiet, uncomplaining servants. Their image is constructed against African American domestic workers and is portrayed as seemingly more loyal and subservient to their employers (p. 106). Yet this acceptance of Asian Americans into the home is only contingent on their place of servitude; they can never fully be welcomed into the family. Kim explains that this model of perpetual foreigner persists, as the representation of Asian Americans in television has changed very little. This chapter suggests that, as with reimagining roles for Black characters, media producers need to create more lead roles for Asian actors to integrate them more prominently into the televisual landscape.

The final chapter examines the Latina maid, a highly visible yet invisible symbol in American culture and American media; she is one of the most recognized racialized domestic workers today. Kim explains that the Latina maid structures absence—she signifies class and achievement for the family who hires her, yet "her labor and sometimes her personhood need to be hidden, particularly from the law" (p. 132). Through an examination of *Dudley* (p. 139), *I Married Dora* (p. 144), *Designing Women* (p. 149), and Rosa Lopez, the maid in the O. J. Simpson trial, Kim analyzes how the Latina maid represents tensions between the need for domestic workers and the public disavowal/disposability of their labor. Specifically, the Latina maid embodies anxieties and fears about citizenship and immigration; she is an "outsider who is inside

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someone's home" (p. 135). In this way, the figure of the Latina maid produces and mediates social relations between race, class, the nuclear family, and the law.

Maid for Television: Race, Class, Gender, and a Representational Economy explains how the figure of the domestic servant discursively and intertextually "marks the boundaries of race and class" (p. 158). It examines the constitutive nature of televisual representation and how race meanings are deep-seated but changeable. The figure of the maid negotiates race, class, and gendered positions while mediating between the family and public sphere; Kim's deconstruction of these supporting characters reveals their ideological power. Yet, even through the representation of their difference, Whiteness is kept in balance (p. 162).

The book ends with a call to action—for both media creators and viewers. Kim advocates for a new system of representation that does not re-create racial hierarchy. In this sense, the epilogue suggests that true media diversity pursues counterhegemonic stories that give all characters depth and meaningful development. Kim challenges not only creators but also audiences. Viewers can be agentic in their viewing practices and interrogate their preferences because producers work to profit from their imagined enjoyment. Thus, audiences can instigate change by demanding equitable representation. Television, as a product of social power, also produces social power; hence, it remains a medium of creating and furthering change. Kim closes with the belief and hope that encouraging meaningful diversity in media is a creative practice, not a limiting one. Televisual narratives can inspire new racial understandings, if only we pursue them.