

Professor studies housework dilemma

By Beth Hege
Emerald Contributor

Zoe Baird paid an uncommonly high price for employing a domestic servant, losing her bid to become U.S. attorney general. But what Baird did by hiring an undocumented Latina to do her housework is hardly uncommon.

When women head into the paid work force, they often find themselves still responsible for household chores.

"Housework has been considered women's work simply because women have to do it," said Mary Romero, a University sociologist and author of the book *MAID in the U.S.A.*

Romero will read from her book Tuesday at 4 p.m. in the Gerlinger Lounge.

Beginning in 1983, Romero interviewed 25 Chicana domestic workers in Denver and conducted research on race, class and gender in housework.

"The interviews were not easy," Romero said. "They were painful to do. Women did not want to talk about the most degrading area of their lives."

"Housework is not inherently degrading," she said. "It becomes degrading because of social relationships."

Because housework holds low status, whoever performs the task is given the lowest status. Often that means women of one class or race oppressing women of another.

"None of us can claim not to be the oppressor," Romero said. "Yes, white, middle-class women may be oppressed, but does that justify oppressing someone else, particularly women of color?"

In her book, Romero addresses the racism

and class discrimination in the hiring and treatment of Chicana domestic workers. She includes stories from her own life and work.

"I am very conscious of segregation," she said. "I remember employers watching me all the time, of children my own age going to play tennis while I picked up after them. In high school and college I spent my weekends and vacations working in homes of students who I otherwise would be sitting next to in a classroom."

Romero said she has not escaped race and class differences in the world of academia.

After spending five years teaching and working as an assistant dean at Yale University, Romero presented her research on domestics at a sociology conference.

"I was on the job market at the time, and after my presentation a colleague asked how the job search was going," she said. "I said I hadn't gotten an offer yet, and he said, 'Don't worry, you can always clean houses. You know that work very well.'"

Romero said she grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Denver.

"I grew up knowing what racism was about," she said. "The lessons of my life have been hard."

Even though Romero, her mother and her sisters had worked as domestic laborers, it didn't occur to Romero to choose the experiences of domestics as a research topic until she had completed her Ph.D. and accepted a teaching position at the University of Texas-El Paso.

In the border town of El Paso, Mexican domestic workers are common. While visiting in El Paso to search for housing, Romero witnessed the treatment of a young Mexican woman by her colleague and his family.

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— Mary Romero,
University sociology professor

"I saw a 16-year-old undocumented worker who was sexually harassed, underpaid and mistreated. It made me question the taken-for-granted reality of the women in my life," Romero said.

"I got on the plane and tears were running down my face. It was shocking to realize that someone would treat another like that," she said. "I thought of my mother and how I would feel if someone had treated her like that."

Romero's book has won acclaim by feminist and mainstream publications for her approach to the topics of race, class and gender.

"I wanted this book to be easy to read," she said. "I have been happy about the response from Chicanos and children of domestics."

"So many times after a talk at a university or conference, students will come to me and say, 'My mother was a domestic.' To me, that's the validation; it's more important than getting published in a major journal," Romero said. "People in our community are finally talking about the work of our mothers and sisters."

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Spring ballot includes citywide restaurant tax

By Meg Dedolph
Emerald Reporter

Eugene voters will decide March 23 on a citywide restaurant tax and two levies, one to continue a county extension service and one to maintain county law enforcement and jail services.

The city restaurant tax is a charter amendment that, if passed, will impose a 3 percent tax on food and beverages sold to the public for immediate consumption.

Included under this tax are hot foods, salads and dispensed soft drinks sold in grocery stores, as well as foods sold in restaurants, push carts and athletic concession stands.

Whole cakes, pies or breads, like those sold in bakeries, are exempt from the tax, as well as meals served to hospital patients and in schools. Also exempt are meals sold in conjunction with accommodations, for example dormitories and fraternity houses.

Temporary establishments that do not sell food for more than seven days each year will not be taxed. These include, for example, a food booth specifically operated for the Eugene Celebration.

Restaurant owners will be allowed to keep 5 percent of the tax collected to cover administrative costs.

Also on the ballot is a \$5,808,815 tax levy for the upcoming year

to maintain Lane County law enforcement and jail programs.

If passed, the levy would pay for 13 patrol deputies and two dispatchers/clerks, who would respond to emergencies, make routine patrols and investigate crimes.

The funds would also provide for mental health treatment, juvenile and adult drug and alcohol treatment, and the forest work camp and work release center.

The county is also seeking voter approval of a levy to fund the Oregon State University/Lane County Extension services.

This \$560,032 levy would maintain office staff, purchase supplies and cover related expenses generated by county extension agents. As a result, the extension service could continue to offer 4-H youth programs and educational programs in home economics, forestry, nutrition and energy.

The extension service would also maintain the Master Gardener and Master Home Preserver program, where volunteers trained in gardening and home preserving answer telephone hotlines and speak at clinics.

Other measures on the ballot ask voter approval for rural fire protection outside of the Eugene-Springfield area and a library expansion project near Florence.

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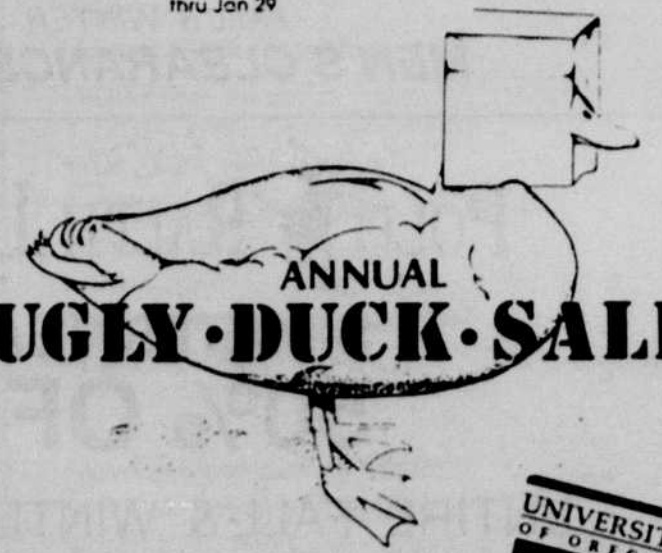
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