

Worldview 2013
Wexner Center for the Arts
Teacher Resources for *Doméstica*



“For me, the phenomenon of the Brazilian housemaid was a good way to explore the contradictions in Brazilian society. The country has one of the biggest economies in the world today. Society is changing but there are still huge inequalities in terms of wealth and expectations. I thought the position and existence of the housemaid in our society was a good way to explore this”

- Gabriel Mascaro

Film Synopsis

Seven adolescents take on the mission of filming, for one week, their family's housemaids and hand over the footage to the director to make a film. The images that confront us uncover the complex relationship that exists between housemaids and their employers, a relationship that confuses intimacy and power in the workplace and provides us with an insight into the echoes of a colonial past that linger in contemporary Brazil.

Source: <http://cargocollective.com/gabrielmascaro-en/Housemaids>



About the Director



Gabriel Mascaro lives and works in Recife, Brazil. Involved in both cinema & visual arts, Mascaro has shown work at a number of contemporary art museums and film festivals. Mascaro is internationally recognized for his work and has participated in the Videoformes/Videobrasil Art In Residence Program, working with installations and pre-production of an upcoming feature film, *Bull Down!* In order to make *Doméstica*, Mascaro allowed 25 teenagers to capture the footage for the documentary. From the raw footage, Mascaro pulled interesting story lines and portraits of the relationships between caretaker, boss, and adolescent. In this way, Mascaro complicates the traditional role of a director by taking on a curatorial position.

For more information about Gabriel Mascaro visit: <http://www.gabrielmascaro.com/>

Domestic Workers in Brazil

What does it mean to be a domestic worker?

Domestic workers perform various tasks in private households such as cleaning, housekeeping, cooking, washing clothes, as well as caring for children, elderly or disabled people and/or pets. Often, domestic work is considered innate, dismissing the skills and competencies that are required. The undervaluation of these workers tends to promote perceptions and attitudes that seemingly legitimize underpay or inadequate monetary compensation.

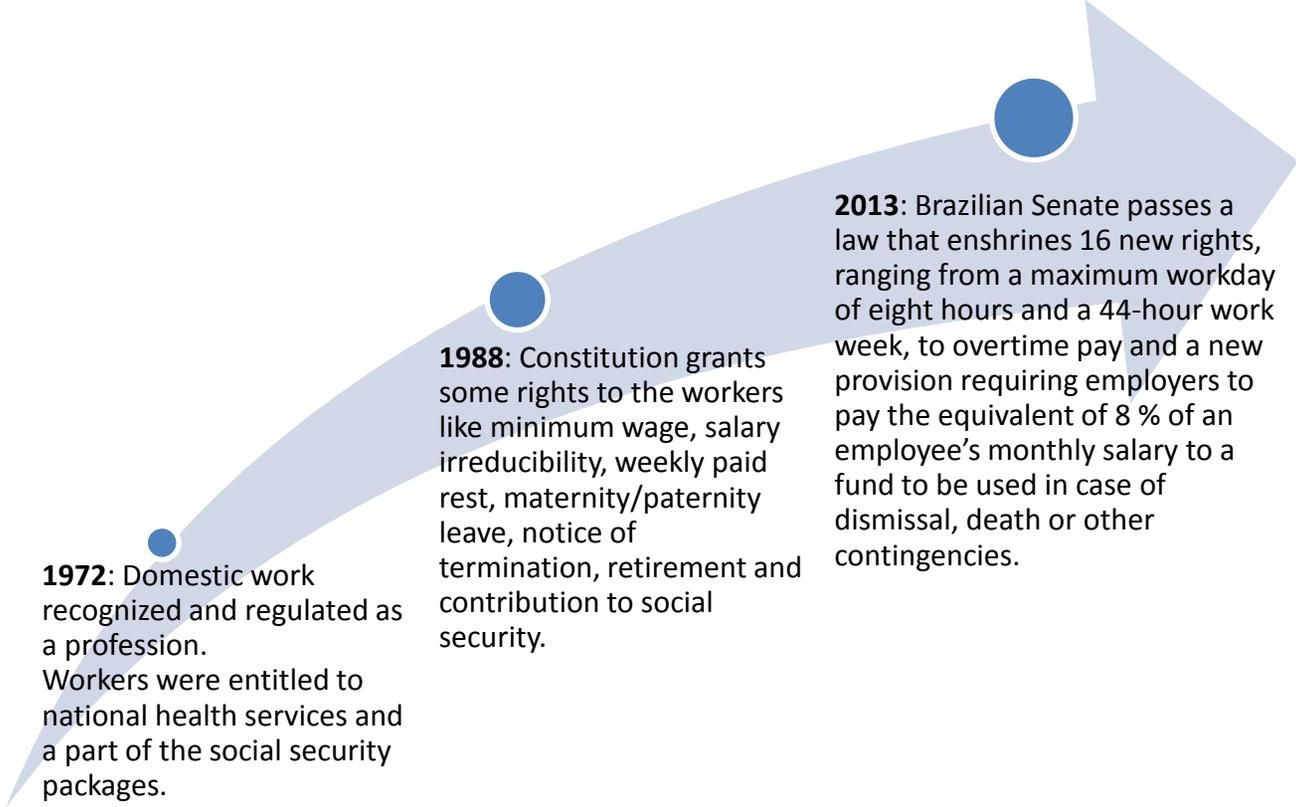
What are the problems of these domestic workers?

- Domestic work is among the lowest paid work in any national labor market. In Brazil, the average wage of a domestic worker was about 35% of the overall average.
- Although the rights of these domestic workers were slowly being acknowledged in terms of minimum wages and paid weekly rest days, there still exist huge legal and social inequalities and denial of labor rights for this group.
- According to ILO estimates, females make up 87% of domestic workers worldwide. Childcare and domestic work is primarily monopolized by women, while catering is predominantly male.
- These workers often come from lineage of historic disadvantage. This includes minority ethnic groups, indigenous people, low-income rural and urban groups or migrants.
- The issue of domestic workers in Brazil is complicated owing to race relations and human rights violations occurring in this situation.

(Read this [2011 report on Wage Indicator](#) for more information about the domestic workers in 12 countries around the world)

Laws Protecting the Rights of Domestic Workers in Brazil

[Source: Mdgfund.org](http://Mdgfund.org), and de Souza (1980)



1972: Domestic work recognized and regulated as a profession. Workers were entitled to national health services and a part of the social security packages.
BUT work hours and overtime pay not addressed.

1988: Constitution grants some rights to the workers like minimum wage, salary irreducibility, weekly paid rest, maternity/paternity leave, notice of termination, retirement and contribution to social security.

2013: Brazilian Senate passes a law that enshrines 16 new rights, ranging from a maximum workday of eight hours and a 44-hour work week, to overtime pay and a new provision requiring employers to pay the equivalent of 8 % of an employee's monthly salary to a fund to be used in case of dismissal, death or other contingencies.

Useful Articles and Links

The issues of the domestic workers in Brazil have been widely covered in the media. In the list below you will find informative articles about the film and the broader issues of the domestic workers in Brazil.

[Brazil's Domestic Workers Continue Fight for Fair Treatment](#): An informative piece on NPR that talks about the Brazilian domestic workers' union its efforts to create awareness of laws that protect their rights.

[Real life story of Creuza Oliveira](#): The voice of Creuza Oliveira tells the story of more than nine million Brazilian domestic workers, mostly women, mostly black, for whom slavery is not relegated to the dust piles of history. It is also the story of the revolutionary impact unions and social movements can have on entrenched and systemic injustices.

The International Labor Organization aims to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues. Visit ilo.org for more information about the International Labor Organization.

[A Guardian Weekly article](#) on Brazil's history of subtle, unspoken, and underestimated racism, illuminating its historic legacy of slave trade.

Excerpt: *"For the last century Brazil has tried to forget its past, refusing to accept the legacy of the slave trade. It has sought to project the image of a country of mixed descent, where the color of a person's skin does not count, a land unfettered by racism where cordial relations reign between citizens of Indian, European and African descent."*

Lesley University presents numerous charts comparing and contrasting that of American and Brazilian culture. As the housemaids are revered as family in many of the profiles asserted through the film, *Domestica*, [a comparison of American and Brazilian family structures](#) proves relevant.

Through [this blog article](#), examine the perpetuated inequalities of a career as a housemaid. Not only does the blog link to actual text and supplementary articles surrounding the controversy of sexist and racist relations, but quotes the personal experiences of both employers and caretakers to portray the exploitative nature of work as a domestic:

[An article which speaks to the stagnant growth of Brazil's economy](#) as well as the increase of indebted households, deteriorating a sense of consumer confidence and limiting Brazilian spending:

Suggested Themes and Questions to Explore

* *Labor rights*

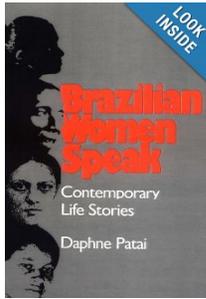
* *Gendered nature of domestic work*

* *Economic inequalities in Brazil*

* *Past & present forms of slavery*

- How do you conceptualize the different relationships between the teenagers and their housemaids?
- How has the past of each of the housemaids contributed to their perspective or outlook on life?
- How has the career as a domestic defined the identity of the portrayed housemaids? How has it contributed to a loss of identity for these dedicated employees?
- This film is as much about the housemaids as the households that they work for. If both of these economic brackets are present in Brazilian culture, how does that inform the greater economic situation present in the country?
- Careers as nannies, housemaids, and caretakers are common in the U.S. Is the system in Brazil different than the one we might think about in America? Compare and contrast.
- In the case of Lucimar, we are told that her mother was also a housemaid. The boss of Lucimar considered her a childhood friend. In what ways does this generation of house servants point to greater problems in the social dynamic? Could you compare this practice to slavery?

Suggested Books

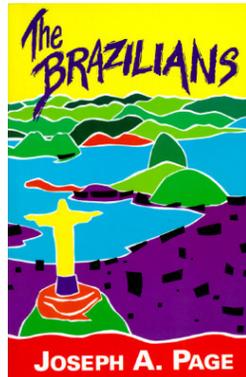


Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Stories by: Daphne Patai

Professor of Women's Studies and of Portuguese at the University of Massachusetts, Daphne Patai creates a portrait of women in Brazil through interviews conducted in 1981. Twenty women from diverse backgrounds are presented in a way that attempts to preserve their individual voice, highlighting social diversity and experience.

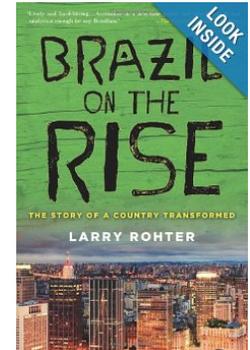
The Brazilians by: Joseph A. Page

Page shapes a compelling description of the qualities encompassing the people of Brazil. Utilizing the country's history, events, economics, and culture, Page depicts a Brazilian national character of contradictions, as a country of vast beauty and immense poverty, charming and yet, surprisingly violent.



Brazil on the Rise: The Story of a Country Transformed by: Larry Rohter

In this novel, New York Times reporter Larry Rohter illuminates the culture, history, and economy of Brazil beyond that of perpetuated and popular stereotype. Excerpt: *"He charts Brazil's amazing jump from a debtor nation to one of the world's fastest growing economies, unravels the myth of Brazil's sexually charged culture, and portrays in vivid color the underbelly of impoverished favelas. With Brazil leading the charge of the Latin American decade, this critically acclaimed history is the authoritative guide to understanding its meteoric rise."*



For a more extensive reading list of books about Brazilian culture visit: <http://www.thebraziliansound.com/booksul.htm>

More Documentaries on Related Topics

[Maid in America](#): Three years in the making, this documentary takes an intimate and emotional look at the lives of three Latin American immigrant women in Los Angeles who've left their own families behind to earn a living cleaning other people's homes and caring for other people's children.

[Lakshmi and Me](#): In this intimate examination of the relationship between Indian filmmaker Nishtha Jain and her young maid, Lakshmi, Jain holds up a mirror to her own culture and the pervasive caste system that can still determine an individual's fate in life. Set against this backdrop, where servants are habitually treated as social inferiors, the film looks at what can happen when an employer shows empathy, and a silent worker finds her voice.

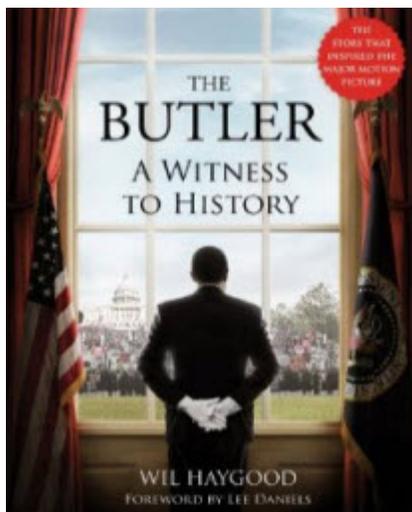
[If you don't come in on Sunday don't come in on Monday](#): It is an hour-long story, told in photographs, documents, and historical footage, of workers in America from the settling of Jamestown in 1607 to the struggle of the United Farm Workers today. With a broad brush, it paints the contribution of workers to the survival of the colonies before the Revolution, and to the growth and development of the United States afterward. Nor does it omit a discussion of slavery or the exploitation of women and children that began with the Industrial revolution.

[Brazil: A Racial Paradise](#): Part of the program *Black in Latin America*, Professor Gates from Harvard in the segment, "Brazil: A Racial Paradise," discusses how the 'rainbow nation' of Brazil is beginning to understand its history in the slave trade.

[Child Domestic Workers](#): A documentary about child domestic workers, the Society for Protection of Child Rights confronts the viewer with various narratives of child laborers in Pakistan. The immense exploitation and dark realities reveal a grave truth of those who become domestic workers in youth, illuminating a voice of many unheard children buried in the toil and exertion, a thief to their innocence.

[In Our Care](#): Produced and directed by Selena Rhine, "In Our Care" is a documentary which emphasizes workers who strive to fight for their rights and legitimacy as nannies and caretakers, while simultaneously tending to the demands of their own families. Throughout the process, Rhine worked in collaboration with Domestic Workers United (DWU) to expose oppression and surface relevance for fair labor standards.

Contemporary Connections



[The-Butler-A-Witness-History](#) : Wil Haygood's *The Butler: A Witness to History* explores the social implications of personal experience, as individuals casted to the shadows are often able to shed the most light on the happenings of history. Lee Daniels' *The Butler*, a recent film, was created from the impetus of Wil Haygood's 2008 Washington Post supplemental article, "A Butler Served Well by this Election." The story of the butler, Eugene Allen, depicts a stable employee for eight U.S. presidents, who, in turn, embodied the overlooked background of America's effort to redefine its racial sensibilities.

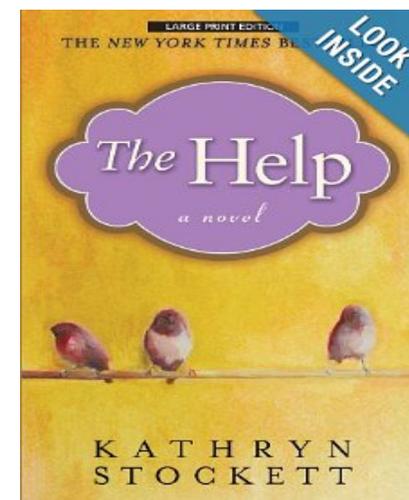
Read Wil Haygood's original Washington Post article:

http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-11-07/politics/41367019_1_eugene-allen-kitchen-helene

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4667024-the-help>: Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* recounts the lives of black maids working in white Southern homes in the 1960s. Infinitely applicable to the housemaids of *Domestica*, *The Help* an understanding of the significance of these women, both appreciatively, as house workers who fall scrutinized by the unfair treatment of their employers and relationally, as human beings immersed in the tension of reality and unrelenting hope.

Read about Stockett's personal inspiration and relation to the novel:

<http://kathrynstockett.com/books/the-help/qa/>



*How do these resources provide further, useful sensitivity to the comprehension of the difficulties domestic workers face still today?

*Does evolution of time truly imply progression of societal acceptance? What are the similarities and differences of these historically underappreciated employees to that of the domestic workers in Brazil?

About Brazil



Capital: Brasilia

Population: 201,009,622 (July 2013 est.)

Ethnic Groups: White 53.7%, Mulatto (mixed white and black) 38.5%, Black 6.2%, other (includes Japanese, Arab, Amerindian) 0.9%, unspecified 0.7% (According to the 2000 census)

Languages: Portuguese is the official and most widely spoken language. (Less common languages include Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, English, and a large number of minor Amerindian languages)

Literacy Rate: 90.4% (people of 15+ years can read and write)

Climate: Mostly tropical



Government type: Federal Republic

Administrative divisions: 26 states (estados, singular - estado) and 1 federal district* (distrito federal); Acre, Alagoas, Amapa, Amazonas, Bahia, Ceara, Distrito Federal*, Espirito Santo, Goias, Maranhao, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Minas Gerais, Para, Paraiba, Parana, Pernambuco, Piaui, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, Rondonia, Roraima, Santa Catarina, Sao Paulo, Sergipe, Tocantins

Source: [The world factbook](#)

More about Brazil

PBS also provides an interactive [timeline of Brazil](#)

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency provides [an introductory guide](#) in comprehending Brazil's geography, government, society, economy, transnational issues, and more.

Visit this [interactive website to better comprehend the diversity of Brazil's people](#), as its cultural and racial magnitude and multiplicities are definitive of Brazil's identity.

Through a depiction of customs such as Rio de Janeiro's largest carnival, the most immense throughout the world, [this CNN article](#) exposes the dense influence of thriving African culture in Brazil. The article uses music, dance, and the Catholic tradition to knot the intimate relationship amongst these cultures.

The Brazilian dance form [Capoeira](#) is seeded in the deepest roots of the country's historic slavery. With a movement vocabulary intentionally resembling that of a fight, different rhythms are utilized to alert the *capoeiristas* of approaching danger to avoid being caught. Employed as a historic form of resistance, the *Capoeira* genre emulates an attack stance coupled with acrobatic movement to façade a harmless dance to overseers and plantation owners. Today, its Brazilian popularity is only rivaled by that of soccer.

Demonstration of the *Capoeira* dance form in this [youtube video](#).

An introduction to Brazil and its cultural depth, [this document](#) indulges in the origins of Brazil and its immense history.

Learn about the [Amazon](#), an area of vast resource and species, including indigenous peoples, through World Wildlife Fund's conservation projects. The health of the Amazon significantly informs the health of the globe.

The etiquette and customs of Brazil are rather rich and diverse. [This site](#) examines Brazilian behavior such as eye contact, non-verbal communication, friendship, business, and appearance which affect and portray the heritage of this culturally immense country.

