

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE US

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Domestic Workers have been written out of major federal and state laws that protect workers.

1863

Originally, domestic workers were the **enslaved, indentured, and semi-free female laborers** of the colonial times

1870

The 1870 Census showed that **52%** of employed women work in "domestic and personal service"

1881

In Atlanta, **the Atlanta Washing Society organized a 10-day strike**. A group of laundresses demanded higher wages and control of the city's washing industry. The Washing Society gained 3,000 members.

1901

After a Chicago newswoman went undercover as a live-in servant to expose domestic workers' experiences of mistreatment and long hours with little pay, **some workers were inspired to form a union**

1930

Domestic Worker Dora Lee Jones launched the Domestic Workers Union which enlisted 75,000 members and initiated the "**Stand Up a Lady for Work campaign**"

1934

Congress passed the **National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act)** protecting the rights of employees in the private sector to form unions, engage in collective bargaining, and participate in strikes. **Domestic and agricultural workers were explicitly excluded**

1935

Fair Labor Standard Act passes

The act introduced the concept of the 44 hour, seven-day work week, established minimum wage, guaranteed time-and-a-half compensation for overtime work in most professions, and forbid child labor. **Domestic Workers and Farm laborers were excluded**

1939

Bessie Brown, a maid in Westchester County, New York, sued her employers after they withheld her wages and assaulted her when she demanded her pay. She lost her case

1964

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

bars employment discrimination on the basis of "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" **but applies with 15 or more employees, practically excluding every domestic worker in the US from its protection**

1967

Age Discrimination in Employment Act protects individuals 40 years of age or older from age-based employment discrimination, **but applies only to employers with 20 or more employees**

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1970

Occupational Safety and Health Act

The federal government created an agency to "assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards and providing training, outreach, education, and assistance. **Like the NLRA before, domestic workers are excluded from its protections**

1974

The Fair Labor Standards Act amended Domestic Workers gain protections under the new amendments to the 1938 act, **but babysitters and "companions" of elderly persons are still excluded**

1990

American with Disabilities Act

This law protects individuals with disabilities from employment discrimination but like the Civil Rights Act before, **it applies only to workplaces with 15 or more employees, leaving out most domestic workers**

1995

The Washington City Papers " Capital Slaves" report uncovered a secret system of slavery employed by a number of foreign diplomats and members of the World Bank, the IMF, and other international institutions who under the State Department program, were permitted to "import" household help.

2007

In the Supreme Court case **Long Island Care at Home Ltd v. Coke**, home care worker, Evelyn Coke claimed she was unfairly denied minimum wage and overtime pay by her employer. Citing the companionship exemption of the amended Fair Labor Standards Act, **the Supreme Court ruled that a domestic worker who labored three consecutives 24-hour shifts, and regularly worked 70 hours a week for \$7 an hour, was not entitled to overtime pay**

2007

The National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) forms

2010

New York Domestic Workers Bill of Rights passes

The first such bill in the country gives New York State domestic workers the right to overtime pay, one guaranteed day off per week (or overtime pay if they agree to work on that day), three paid days off each year, protection under the New York State Human Rights Law, and the creation of a special cause of action for domestic workers who suffer sexual assault or racial harassment

2019

Westchester County adopted the New York Earned Sick Leave Law (WCESLL)

Domestic workers employed by an employer, regardless of size, are entitled to earn and use up to 40 hours of earned paid sick time in a year. Domestic workers also accrue sick time under the law at a rate of one hour for every seven days worked, which is an addition to the one day rest period already provided to domestic workers under New York State Law

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