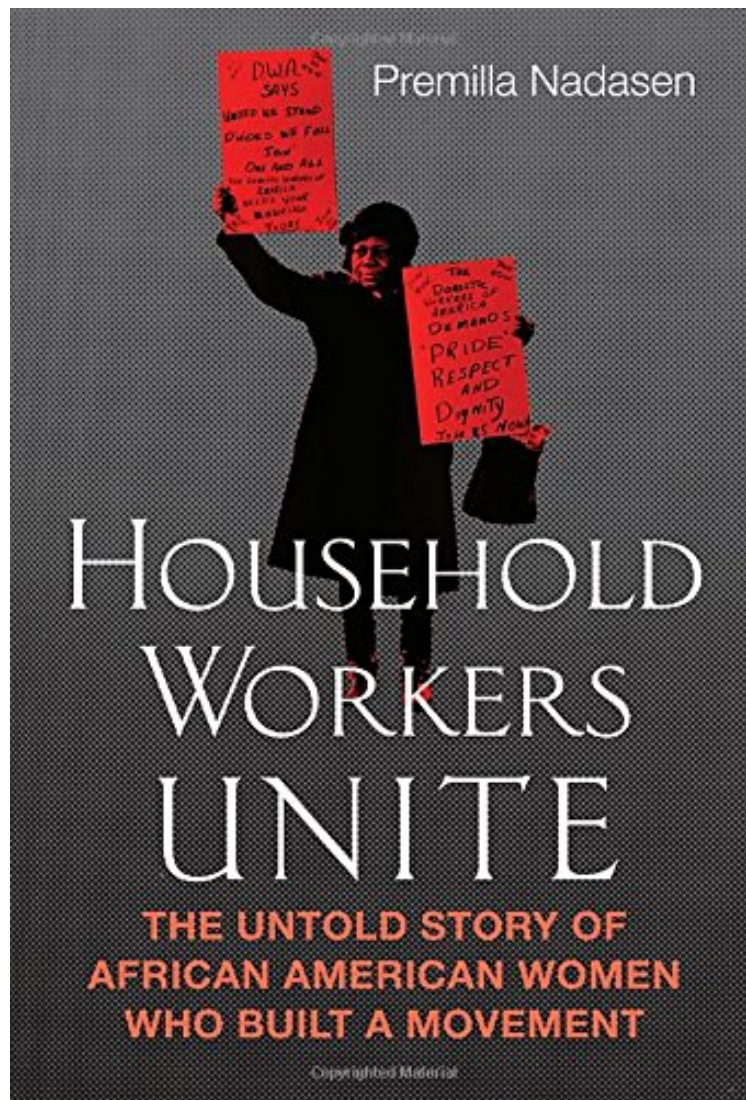


[Download] Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement

# Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement

Premilla Nadasen

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**Premilla Nadasen : Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book! Wasn't the quickest readBy Matthew RubinGreat book! Wasn't the quickest read, but I thoroughly enjoyed it and learned a lot about amazing women that I had never heard of

before, but we all should. I also had countless moments of thinking "oh wow I want to read more about that!", and by the end, probably half the citations in the end notes had been highlighted. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excecelent capture the history and culture of the Domestic work ...By Barbara YoungExcecelent capture the history and culture of the Domestic work industry here in USA every worker should read this book. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fills a gap in labor historyBy ChrisThis book seeks to counteract the pop cultural trope that black domestic workers (maids) are passive and loving mammies (see *The Help*, *Gone with the Wind*, etc) Domestic workers acted as the backbone to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and other civil rights projects. Without the support of black domestics, who made up the bulk of bus riders, the boycott would have been dead on arrival. These women also participated in a positive way by cooking and selling food to raise money for the boycott. One of the domestics profiled in the book provided a safe place (and safe food) for Martin Luther King during the boycott. Their participation in the civil rights movement gave these black women the organizing experience and confidence to agitate for better working conditions. Before they began to organize, the jobs of black domestics were hellish (not that they get treated like Silicon valley CEOs now). Women were picked up at "slave markets" downtown, physically examined, partially paid in leftovers and hand-me-downs, paid starvation wages, and in general treated as less than human. Organizing workers is always an uphill battle, but organizing domestic workers was like climbing a sheer mountain face. They've all got different employers, they all work in different locations, and after scrubbing the floor on their hands and knees they don't necessarily have the energy to organize and attend a meeting. In addition to this, domestic workers have traditionally been ignored by the established industrial unions. The author details the various groups these women formed. The domestics developed model contracts, training programs, and petitioned legislatures for the extension of workplace protections. Household work had not been legally been considered work. As a result, domestic workers were not subject to the minimum wage or workplace safety laws. The author's major of theme of this book is the importance of storytelling to these women. Getting together to vent their frustration about how cheap Mrs. Smith is instills a sense of solidarity in these women. Additionally, when maids have to discuss how awful their jobs are in public hearings, it gains them sympathy for their cause of better work conditions. These brave African American women were able to score some victories. The minimum wage was extended to domestic workers (some of them anyway) and they do have some basic workplace protections. The fact that they were able to organize and achieve anything in the face of many obstacles is really impressive. By writing this book and working with domestic workers organizations, Premilla Nadasen, professor of history at Barnard College, has her heart in the right place. Unfortunately this book comes off as overly academic. I wish that the author could liven up her writing style. The strongest parts of the book are when the author is conveying and quoting the stories of the domestics. I also wish that there had been more than four photographs in the book. It's helpful to have a face go with a name. Despite my criticism of the writing style, this is a well-researched history that fills a void and I learned a good deal. I hope that in the future the author considers doing an oral history project of present day domestic workers.

Telling the stories of African American domestic workers, this book resurrects a little-known history of domestic worker activism in the 1960s and 1970s, offering new perspectives on race, labor, feminism, and organizing. In this groundbreaking history of African American domestic-worker organizing, scholar and activist Premilla Nadasen shatters countless myths and misconceptions about an historically misunderstood workforce. Resurrecting a little-known history of domestic-worker activism from the 1950s to the 1970s, Nadasen shows how these women were a far cry from the stereotyped passive and powerless victims; they were innovative labor organizers who tirelessly organized on buses and streets across the United States to bring dignity and legal recognition to their occupation. Dismissed by mainstream labor as "unorganizable," African American household workers developed unique strategies for social change and formed unprecedented alliances with activists in both the women's rights and the black freedom movements. Using storytelling as a form of activism and as means of establishing a collective identity as workers, these women proudly declared, "We refuse to be your mammies, nannies, aunties, uncles, girls, handmaidens any longer." With compelling personal stories of the leaders and participants on the front lines, *Household Workers Unite* gives voice to the poor women of color whose dedicated struggle for higher wages, better working conditions, and respect on the job created a sustained political movement that endures today. Winner of the 2016 Sara A. Whaley Book Prize From the Hardcover edition.

"Valuable for its recovery of a largely neglected piece of labor history, particularly one in which race, class, immigration, and gender intersect, this work may prove most useful as a how-to guide for those looking to effect change in the landscape of the new economy. Look to Nadasen's history for an understanding of how the struggle began."—Kirkus s "An iconoclastic history of African American women who organized and lobbied to improve their working conditions."—Shelf Awareness "Household Workers Unite is the story of "the help" helping themselves. GIVE IT TO: Anyone still gushing about *The Help*."—Bitch "This is a story of extraordinary heroism of domestic workers fighting against difficult odds to attain dignity, respect, and fair pay for their hard work. Through offering us this revealing window into the past, *Household Workers Unite* deepens the hope and energy of all who work within

today's domestic worker rights movement...This book is inspiring, identifying and validating important tools for organizing and strategizing in today's domestic labor struggles."—New Solutions: Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health Policy

"As the ugliness of racism today wrenches our hearts, rendering a feeling of helplessness, it is restorative to learn about the empowering leadership of black women domestic workers and civil rights activists who have helped change laws and policies—and to whom we are all indebted."—Sheila Bapat, *Feministing*

Nadasen's book is a powerful reminder that 20th century activism, led by some truly incredible women, has helped to make our present-day victories possible."—Rachel M. Cohen, *The American Prospect*

"One of the most daring labor movements of the civil rights era started not on the factory floor, but in the kitchen...Nadasen's account comes at a particularly relevant moment...Household Workers Unite calls on feminists to once again redefine the workplace, together and on their own terms. Home may be where the heart is, but it's also where the fight is."—Michelle Chen, *Ms.*

"Nadasen's definitive history is a must-read for workers, activists, and historians. With insight and precision, she brings to life the dynamic women who, in their courageous pursuit of respect and justice, inspired many movements and future generations."—Ai-jen Poo, director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and codirector of the Caring Across Generations campaign

"Premilla Nadasen offers a critically important look at a chapter encompassing the histories of labor, women and African Americans: the struggle of the African American domestic worker. Nadasen resurfaces a history of struggle that has been largely ignored and without which current efforts to organize domestic workers and other low-paid service workers cannot be fully understood. This book is a tribute to the thousands of Black women who were or are in this industry, and to those who took the courageous step to organize for fairness and justice. This was a book I could not stop reading."—Bill Fletcher, Jr., host of *The Global African*, activist, and author of "They're Bankrupting Us!" And 20 Other Myths About Unions

"Nadasen's stirring account relies on the voices of household workers to expose the routine indignities and hopeful aspirations that encouraged some of the most disadvantaged American women workers to organize others. Nadasen's empathetic, yet unflinching, narrative introduces us to a powerful form of historical storytelling. Bravo."—Alice Kessler-Harris, author of *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*

"Here at last is the story that finally positions black domestic workers at the center of mid-twentieth-century civil rights and anti-racist movement history. In the process of fighting for their rights as citizen-workers, the women whose phenomenal lives are explored in *Household Workers Unite* forged a legacy that deeply informs our social justice struggles today."—Angela Davis, Distinguished Professor Emerita, History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

"Household Workers Unite is a stellar scholarly achievement, a powerful and timely political contribution, and a must read for anyone seriously interested in the confluence of race, class, gender and citizenship in the lives of women of color, and in the historic struggles for social justice, in the 20th and 21st centuries."—Barbara Ransby, Professor at University of Illinois at Chicago, Director of the Social Justice Initiative, and author of the award-winning *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*

About the Author Premilla Nadasen is an associate professor of history at Barnard College, Columbia University, and is the author of several books, including the award-winning *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States*. A longtime scholar-activist, Nadasen works closely with domestic workers' rights organizations, for which she has written policy briefs and served as an expert academic witness. She also writes about household labor, social movements, and women's history for *Ms.*, the Progressive Media Project, and other media outlets.