

Viola Davis and Cicely Tyson honored for efforts in raising awareness about labor protections for domestic workers

Written by Patricia Weaver

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Washington, DC—Last week, the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) hosted "Leading with Love," a special gala and awards dinner celebrating more than 10,000 nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers who work as part of the NDWA every day, as well as the movement's special champions Viola Davis and Cicely Tyson.

Domestic worker advocates Guillermina Castellanos and Linda Oalican and domestic worker groups Casa Latina (Seattle, WA), Domestic Workers United (New York, NY), and Mujeres Unidas y Activas (Oakland, CA), who have been on the front lines of the ongoing fight to win dignity, respect, and labor protections for domestic workers in the United States, were also honored.

Both Viola Davis and Cicely Tyson's performances in the Academy Award-winning film "The Help" brought domestic workers into the public spotlight, sparking an unprecedented national conversation about the realities of today's domestic workers.

Both actresses are the daughters of domestic workers, giving them first-hand knowledge of the need for domestic worker rights in the US.

Accepting NDWA's inaugural Voice of Love Award, Viola Davis said, "I am the daughter of May Alice Davis, who was a maid, and the granddaughter of Mozelle Logan, who was a maid. So my very presence here is, for me, born from their hard work. And when people ask me, 'How can you play a maid, Viola, in 2012?' I said 'I'm not playing a maid—I'm playing Aibeleen Clark.'"

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Tyson broke a color barrier for African-American women on television, and has dedicated herself to human rights, civil rights, and education issues throughout her 50-year long career. She was awarded NDWA's first-ever Lifetime of Leadership Award.

The two actresses are a source of inspiration to domestic workers and have helped raise public consciousness about the need for labor protections domestic workers. New York is the only state in the country that has ended the 75-year-exclusion of domestic workers from workplace protections. At the end of the legislative term last month, Governor Jerry Brown of California vetoed the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (AB 889), denying basic labor protections to hundreds of thousands of domestic workers across California. The bill, which garnered the backing of hundreds of thousands of workers and concerned employers and supports from around the country as well as high-profile endorsements from The New York Times and actress Amy Poehler, would have extended protections most American workers take for granted, like meal and rest breaks, overtime pay, and recourse for workplace abuse, to domestic workers.