



# *Black Women*

Fought  
For More  
Than a  
Paycheck



# 01



## THE CONDITIONS THAT LED TO ORGANIZING

Following emancipation, racial and gender discrimination limited Black women's access to better-paying jobs. Many worked in agriculture and domestic service, where low wages and long hours made supporting their families difficult.

Employers depended on their labor while paying them poorly and subjecting them to mistreatment. These conditions led Black women to organize for higher wages, shorter hours, and greater control over their work.





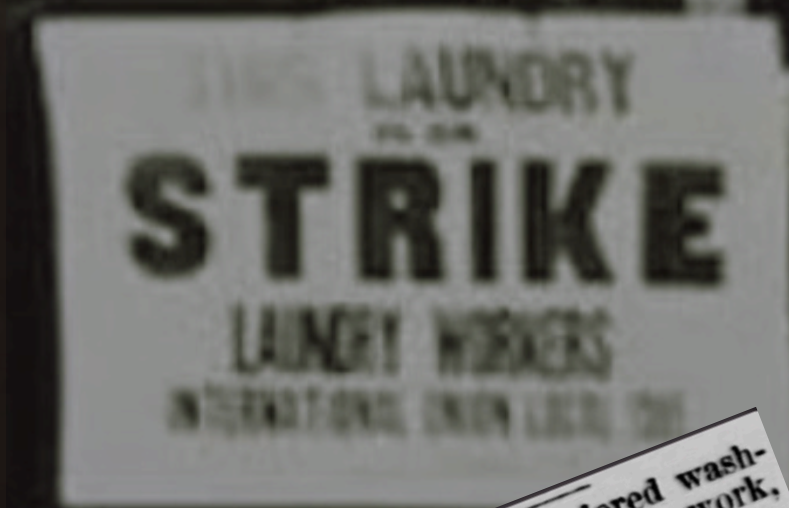
# 02

## ATLANTA'S WASHERWOMEN

In 1881, Black laundresses in Atlanta earned approximately \$4 to \$8 a month for work that required carrying water, washing clothes by hand, and ironing for long hours.

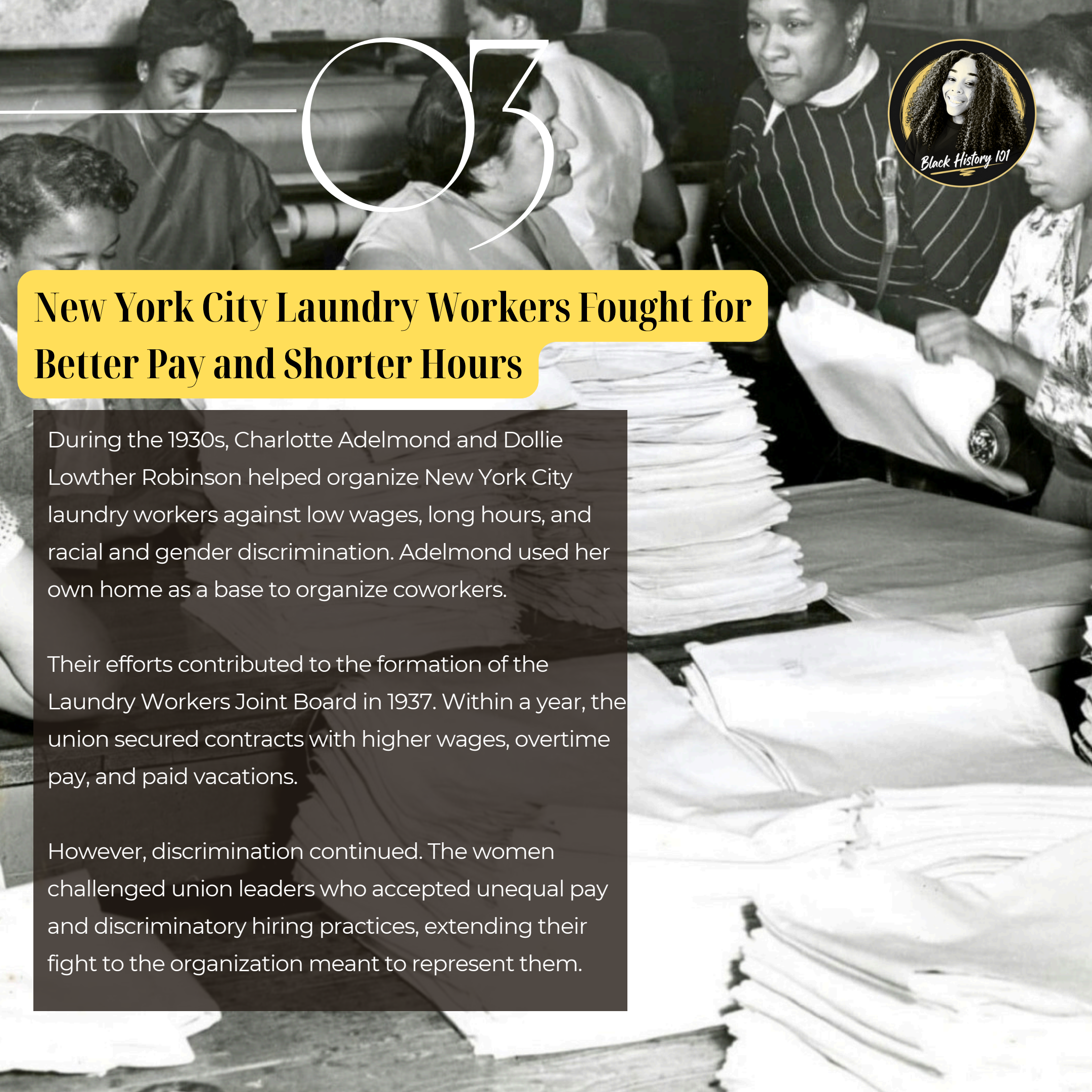
To challenge these conditions, 20 women formed the Washing Society and called a strike for higher pay. Through door-to-door organizing and support from Black ministers, their numbers grew to 3,000 within three weeks.

Despite arrests and fines, the women continued their demands. Their organizing secured higher wages and pressured the city to withdraw a proposed annual fee targeting organized washerwomen.



**WASHERWOMEN'S STRIKE.**—The colored washerwomen in Atlanta, Ga., have struck work, and refuse to wash for less than \$1 per dozen. They have even effected an organization, which has been joined by nearly two hundred. Several "outrages" by the society have already been perpetrated on outside washerwomen that will call down the law on them.





3



## New York City Laundry Workers Fought for Better Pay and Shorter Hours

During the 1930s, Charlotte Adelmond and Dollie Lowther Robinson helped organize New York City laundry workers against low wages, long hours, and racial and gender discrimination. Adelmond used her own home as a base to organize coworkers.

Their efforts contributed to the formation of the Laundry Workers Joint Board in 1937. Within a year, the union secured contracts with higher wages, overtime pay, and paid vacations.

However, discrimination continued. The women challenged union leaders who accepted unequal pay and discriminatory hiring practices, extending their fight to the organization meant to represent them.



# 04

## DOROTHY BOLDEN AND DOMESTIC WORKERS

Black domestic workers often worked in private homes where low wages and mistreatment were difficult to challenge individually. Having experienced this treatment herself, Dorothy Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers Union in Atlanta in 1968.

Through outreach to other domestic workers, Bolden helped organize a campaign for better pay and fair treatment. According to Georgia State University Library's account, the struggle she helped lead raised wages for Atlanta domestic workers by 33 percent within two years.



# 05



## HATTIE CANTY AND THE FRONTIER STRIKE

Hattie Canty's experience as a hotel worker shaped her involvement in organizing for better working conditions. In 1990, she became president of Culinary Workers Union Local 226. The following year, 550 workers at Las Vegas's Frontier Hotel and Casino went on strike to challenge unfair wages and treatment.

Under her leadership and alongside other unions, workers continued their strike for more than six years. Their refusal to return under the existing conditions led to a 1998 agreement with a new owner to restore their jobs, recognize union contracts, and provide back pay and benefits.





# 04

## WHAT THESE STRUGGLES REVEAL

The experiences of these women reveal how low wages, mistreatment, and discrimination led Black women to organize. By forming unions and refusing to work under unfair conditions, they pressured employers to increase wages and improve their treatment of workers.

However, joining a union did not guarantee equal treatment. Black women also had to challenge racial and gender discrimination within the organizations they helped build.



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