

DARDEN WORKERS TELL THEIR STORY

DARDEN is one of the largest full-service restaurant companies in the United States, with over 1,800 locations that employs 177,000 workers and serves more than 360 million meals per year.¹ The company owns Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse, Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen, Yard House, Capital Grille, Seasons 52, Bahama Breeze, and Eddie V's.²



For years, Darden has been a leading force within the National Restaurant Association and outside of it lobbying to maintain the subminimum wage for tipped workers, currently \$2.13 an hour.³ A legacy of slavery, the subminimum wage for tipped workers today forces a workforce that is over two thirds women, disproportionately women of color, to suffer from the highest rates of economic insecurity and sexual harassment of any industry in the United States because they must tolerate inappropriate customer behavior to feed their families in tips.⁴ The subminimum wage for tipped workers also increases racial inequity, because customer bias in tipping results in workers of color who rely on tips to earn less than their white counterparts.⁵

Darden has been embroiled in numerous controversies including lawsuits over its labor practices that have especially harmed tipped workers.^{6,7} In March and April 2021, we polled Darden employees to understand their experience of race and gender based harassment and discrimination at Darden companies. As of April 9, 2021, nearly 200 Darden workers responded. The vast majority (88%) were tipped workers; 81% were servers and 24% were bartenders. Over half (53%) worked at the Olive Garden; the remaining workers worked at the company's other brands. Nearly three quarters (72%) are women.

1. One in five workers (20%) reported that they did not receive tips or additional wages from their employer that brought them up to the minimum wage in their state.

- a. About two thirds (65%) of all workers surveyed reported earning an hourly rate, before tips, that is lower than the state minimum wage – i.e. a subminimum wage for tipped workers.

2. One in five workers (20%) reported receiving lower tips than others due to their race and/or gender.



3. Nearly 40% (38%) of workers had a coworker, manager or customer act inappropriately or offensively towards them at work because of their race or gender. Some volunteered to share their experience:

"I hate taking Black tables' I hear on a daily basis."

"A manager got my address without permission and called me drunk at 2 am trying to come see me as he was drunk."

"The head cook would always make very suggestive comments to me about my body and a manager would openly talk about women working for Darden as well as customers."

"One coworker would make race jokes and it did not sit right with other people. He called me chocolate gum drop and many other names. I was not very comfortable with [it] but I never said anything because it was my job and everyone in management liked him. If I was upset he would make a joke about me being an angry Black woman. I had an older white couple tell me they did not want me to be their server because I was Black and that they wanted someone else to take care of them and their children. My shift manager went out to talk to the table and give them another server. My General Manager apologized the next day for that situation happening to me."

"There was a lot of sexual harassment going on in my store. Management would 'talk' to said person but nothing ever changed. Lots of bullying! Again management never really did much. The excuse was 'they were just too busy for that right now.'"

"Managers were involved with employees romantically. One manager would say racist comments such as 'so glad he isn't trying to get back in touch with his culture, the dreads weren't very professional'"

"Coworkers requested me to speak more English when I was in the learning process."

"[As a Black woman] I was told I was unable to wear my pink hair. Only naturally occurring colors. But the white women had pink dreadlocks, blue hair and more. I brought it to management and I was told mine was too much and theirs were closer to natural."

**TABLE I
DARDEN WORKER
RESPONSES**

88%

In position that receives tips

20%

Does not receive tips or additional wages from employer to bring them up to the state minimum wage

46%

Part of a tip pool

36%

Received less in tips than other workers

20%

Received a lower tip due to their race and/or gender

38%

Had a coworker, manager, or customer act inappropriately or offensively toward them at work due to their race or gender

Source: One Fair Wage Poll of Darden Workers. Data collected from 03/21 - 4/21

onefairwage.com



1 Darden. (2020). Annual Report - Fiscal Year 2020. https://s2.q4cdn.com/922937207/files/doc_financials/2020/q4/Darden-FY20-Annual-Report-on-10-K-FINAL.pdf.

2 Darden. (2021). Home. Retrieved from <https://www.darden.com/>.

3 ROC United. (May 2017). Stop the Other NRA - Trump and the National Restaurant Association: Scheming to Undermine Wages, Public Health, and Worker Rights. New York, NY: ROC United. https://chapters.rocunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/StopTheNRA_2017_Report_W.pdf.

4 One Fair Wage. (August 2020). A Persistent Legacy of Slavery: Ending the Subminimum Wage for Tipped Workers as a Racial Equity Measure. https://onefairwage.site/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/OFW_LegacyOfSlavery_USA-1.pdf.

5 Lynn, M. et al. (2008). Consumer Racial Discrimination in Tipping: A Replication and Extension. Retrieved 04/13/21. Cornell University - School of Hospitality Administration. <https://www.wagehourlitigation.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/215/2015/10/cornell.pdf>.

6 Smith, B. (December 2020). Times Square Olive Garden employees file complaint alleging racial and gender bias. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/olive-garden-employees-file-discrimination-complaint-times-square-darden-2020-12>.

7 Mattera, P. (October 2014). Darden Restaurant: Corporate Rap Sheet. Corporate Research Project. <https://www.corp-research.org/darden>.