

# Tyi Jones

Overnight Stock Professional, Club Monaco  
Activist, Retail Action Project (RAP) | New York, New York

***“If you present the possibility of things getting better, everyone is always down for the idea of it.”***

Veteran retail worker shares how the Retail Action Project is helping to educate and organize workers to address scheduling, childcare and discrimination issues

*Tyi Jones has been working for more than seven years in retail, a fast-growing and low-wage industry with a significant concentration of black working women. A recent study by progressive think tank Demos projects that there will be 4.1 million American women working in the low-paying retail industry by 2022—a population larger than that of the city of Los Angeles. Jones, who is currently an overnight stock clerk at the clothing store Club Monaco, has worked for some of the best-known brands including American Apparel, Urban Outfitters, Forever 21 and Victoria’s Secret. While the store is closed to customers, Jones does everything from shipping processing and inventory management to folding, maintenance, and refurbishing the floor.*

*Jones is an active member of member of RAP, a member-based organization founded in 2005 that builds the power of retail workers through leadership training and collective actions. The organization was formed through a community-labor partnership between the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, an affiliate of United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, (RWDSU, UFCW) and the Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), a neighborhood organization dedicated to community and economic development. By working together, the partnership helped thousands of retail workers win millions of dollars in unpaid wages. RAP and its members are helping to rewrite standards in the retail industry by investing in leadership development and in campaigns to combat wage theft, unfair scheduling and unfair employment credit checks. A RAP study shows that 55 percent of black retail workers and 51 percent of Latino retail workers are part-time workers, compared to 39 percent of white retail workers who are part-time workers.*

*Jones is focused on educating her fellow retail workers about their rights. In her story, she shares the path that she has taken and what she has learned from RAP.*



I got involved with RAP when it launched a campaign against this horrible retailer I worked for. I don't say their name. A co-worker gave me the philosophy of RAP and what it stands for as far as workers' rights, education and activism. From then on, I was down with the cause.

I was down because they are an organization that caters to workers. Even to this day, workers aren't aware that there are organizations that are there to protect and educate them about the

But with erratic scheduling and on-call shifts, you may not know you're working until you're called about two hours prior to your shift. And erratic scheduling isn't an isolated case. According to a report by the City University of New York and RAP, only about 17 percent of retail workers have a set schedule. The rest have to deal with unpredictable hours and on-call shifts on a day-to-day basis. That's totally irrational because it takes about an hour from any borough just to get to the stores in Manhattan. And then you also have to get

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practices of these businesses that are not always in the best interest of the workers. As workers, we're at the bottom of the totem pole. We are usually told everything is about the business. “Oh, we're sorry, you're fired because it doesn't work for the business.” Or, “Oh, we had to cut your hours because it doesn't work for the business.” But, no one tells you, “We care about you not having a babysitter.” So I was definitely down to spread the word about RAP and let more people know that there's an organization that is there for you and will teach you how to respond in a very active and beneficial way.

A very big issue among workers is erratic scheduling. Some jobs will send out schedules a week in advance, or even a month in advance.

ready. And if you want to make plans, you can't because you might work and you might need a babysitter. All of those things play into scheduling.

Retail workers also face not having enough hours and not having enough money. The RAP report I mentioned previously points out that most retail workers earn less than \$10 an hour; and almost a fifth earn less than \$8 an hour. Full-time work is like a promotion now. Companies are not hiring employees full time. It has to be earned because when you work full time, you get the guaranteed hours and more pay. Part-time status makes it easier for stores to shift workers around. And most part-time employees are black or Latino.

I don't have kids, but I have learned through RAP's different campaigns and the different issues that arise that childcare is a huge problem as far as scheduling and hours. It affects people's lives, especially women, because more than half of low-wage retail workers are female and many times they are the primary caretakers. If you don't have a babysitter, you don't have a job, you don't have money, and you don't have enough hours. It's all a cycle together.

Discrimination issues don't affect me because I don't box myself into that. But I do know that discrimination does exist. I do know women are discriminated against because of their ethnicity and the stereotypes that come along with race—like being an angry black woman. That lingers in someone's mind, especially someone that can't relate to you and doesn't know where you're from. The way that people can discriminate against you can be unconscious, like, "Oh, we have an extra workload but don't ask her, ask this one because her ethnicity is known to be more patient." It leads people toward, against, or around you. I know it can work against people a lot—being black, especially—because that's one of the most misunderstood races in the world.

I think anyone who's exposed to this should definitely look into the Retail Action Project. They're very hands-on with everything they do,

and they welcome feedback, criticism, input and volunteering for all their members and affiliates. There are amazing people. Any question you have about workers' rights, they definitely give you the tools you need to excel and be very bold about approaching a manager or a situation at work. They can also bring you in under the member organizing and training program, which teaches you about labor law and how to organize workers. It's very good.

Workers don't know that they can organize. They don't know what organizing is. They're interested in change, definitely. So, if you present the possibility of things getting better, everyone is always down for the idea of it.

The highest hope I can ever have is for black women in retail, specifically, to not manifest stereotypes. Don't live up to or accept what they want you to be like. Don't ever succumb to it when you're under pressure or you feel like you've been violated or mistreated. There are ways to handle things in a moral, responsible, and ethical way. I would definitely want people to educate themselves and then elevate their minds to carry out any actions that they need to do.

Be very bold in your workplace. It worked for me, and it can definitely open up many more opportunities.

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