



Behind the Kitchen Door

Sarumathi Jayaraman

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"Sustainability is about contributing to a society that everybody benefits from, not just going organic because you don't want to die from cancer or have a difficult pregnancy. What is a sustainable restaurant? It's one in which as the restaurant grows, the people grow with it."-from*Behind the Kitchen Door*

How do restaurant workers live on some of the lowest wages in America? And how do poor working conditions-discriminatory labor practices, exploitation, and unsanitary kitchens-affect the meals that arrive at our restaurant tables? Saru Jayaraman, who launched the national restaurant workers' organization Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, sets out to answer these questions by following the lives of restaurant workers in New York City, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Miami, Detroit, and New Orleans.

Blending personal narrative and investigative journalism, Jayaraman shows us that the quality of the food that arrives at our restaurant tables depends not only on the sourcing of the ingredients. Our meals benefit from the attention and skill of the people who chop, grill, sauté, and serve.*Behind the Kitchen Door* is a groundbreaking exploration of the political, economic, and moral implications of dining out. Jayaraman focuses on the stories of individuals, like Daniel, who grew up on a farm in Ecuador and sought to improve the conditions for employees at Del Posto; the treatment of workers behind the scenes belied the high-toned Slow Food ethic on display in the front of the house.

Increasingly, Americans are choosing to dine at restaurants that offer organic, fair-trade, and free-range ingredients for reasons of both health and ethics. Yet few of these diners are aware of the working conditions at the restaurants themselves. But whether you eat haute cuisine or fast food, the well-being of restaurant workers is a pressing concern, affecting our health and safety, local economies, and the life of our communities. Highlighting the roles of the 10 million people, many immigrants, many people of color, who bring their passion, tenacity, and vision to the American dining experience, Jayaraman sets out a bold agenda to raise the living standards of the nation's second-largest private sector workforce-and ensure that dining out is a positive experience on both sides of the kitchen door.

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