

Beyond Norma Rae: How Puerto Rican and Southern White Women Fought For a Place in the American Working Class

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In the late 1970s, Hollywood producers took the published biography of Crystal Lee Sutton, a white southern textile worker, and transformed it into a blockbuster 1979 film, *Norma Rae*, featuring Sally Field in the title role. This fascinating book reveals how the film and the popular icon it created each worked to efface the labor history that formed the foundation of the film's story. Drawing on an impressive range of sources—union records, industry reports, film scripts, and oral histories—Aimee Loisel's cutting-edge scholarship shows how gender, race, culture, film, and mythology have reconfigured and often undermined the history of the American working class and its labor activism. While *Norma Rae* constructed a powerful image of individual defiance by a white working-class woman, Loisel demonstrates that female industrial workers across the country and from diverse racial backgrounds understood the significance of cultural representation and fought to tell their own stories. Loisel painstakingly reconstructs the underlying histories of working women in this era and makes clear that cultural depictions must be understood as the complicated creations they are.

