

# **Student Essay on Norma Rae and Union Organizing**

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# Essay

## Norma Rae and Union Organizing

In the movie Norma Rae, Sally Field plays the character of Norma Rae based on Crystal Lee Sutton, the real-life union organizer for the J.P. Stevens Mill. Norma Rae uses grass-roots organizing to enlighten the workers about the benefits of a union. She starts at the bottom, the workers, and persists until the whole factory gains the right to form their union. In the end Norma Rae and her partner in unionization, Reuben, succeed in forming the union, but even after union elections it still takes ten years to get a contract at J.P. Stevens.

The fact that the union stayed strong for this amount of time with little or no encouragement from the management shows the strength of human character, and the power of what benefits a union promises to bring to the people who create and believe in it. The working conditions remained the same, the pay probably remained the same. The only aspect of factory life that had changed was the hope for change in the future. They won the right to organize, but for ten years, they won nothing else.

Workers in this time did not have the luxury of quitting and finding work elsewhere. The mill bosses knew that and exploited it as much as they could. The character Norma Rae is inspiring for many reasons, the most obvious being that she is a mostly uneducated woman. She has no experience in public works, but her charm and personality win her co-workers trust and respect. Norma Rae is a text book example of someone following the working class American Dream. The working class American Dream is different than the traditional American Dream.

The working class can not hope to become as successful as those born into a higher tax bracket. Occasionally an entrepreneur from no financial background will break through, but it doesn't happen that often. Norma Rae's dream is simply to have a protective union that will ensure that she and her fellow workers will have a job tomorrow, that their working conditions would not be hazardous to their health, and that they would all get paid more fairly.