



The Politics of Identity: Solidarity Building among America's Working Poor (SUNY series in Public Policy)

Erin E. O'Brien

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Makes the surprising claim that identity politics can facilitate rather than undermine worker solidarity.

Conventional wisdom believes that solidarity among the working poor is rare in the United States and identity politics shoulders a large portion of the blame. The Politics of Identity offers a fresh take on solidarity building and identity among America's working poor by placing workers' voices center stage through the use of fieldwork and in-depth interviews. The book provides the first empirical assessment of long-standing theoretical debates over the effect of identity politics for developing additional solidarities that is politically relevant, theoretically rich, and highly readable.

"...the author's clarity, incisiveness and use of methodological rigor results in a book that makes an important contribution to our understanding of how America's working poor perceive themselves, and the implications these perceptions could have for social action and policy." — Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare

"...The Politics of Identity ... focuses on the author's extensive research and fieldwork in the service industry, but the information learned can be easily applied to a number of organizing situations and other categories of workers." — Labor Studies Journal

"O'Brien successfully cracks the long-held understanding that identity politics precludes worker solidarity." — Journal of Politics

"Erin O'Brien's The Politics of Identity pushes past the settled oppositions to show how a politics of identities can mobilize, rather than undermine, collective action by workers. Drawing upon vivid worker portraits from extensive fieldwork, the author details in highly readable prose how we need to think more creatively if workers are to contest the indignities of the low-wage economy unfolding before us. Here is a book that lays the groundwork for renewed hope and optimism in an era of worker discontent." — Sanford F. Schram, author of Welfare Discipline: Discourse, Governance, and Globalization

Erin E. O'Brien is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

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