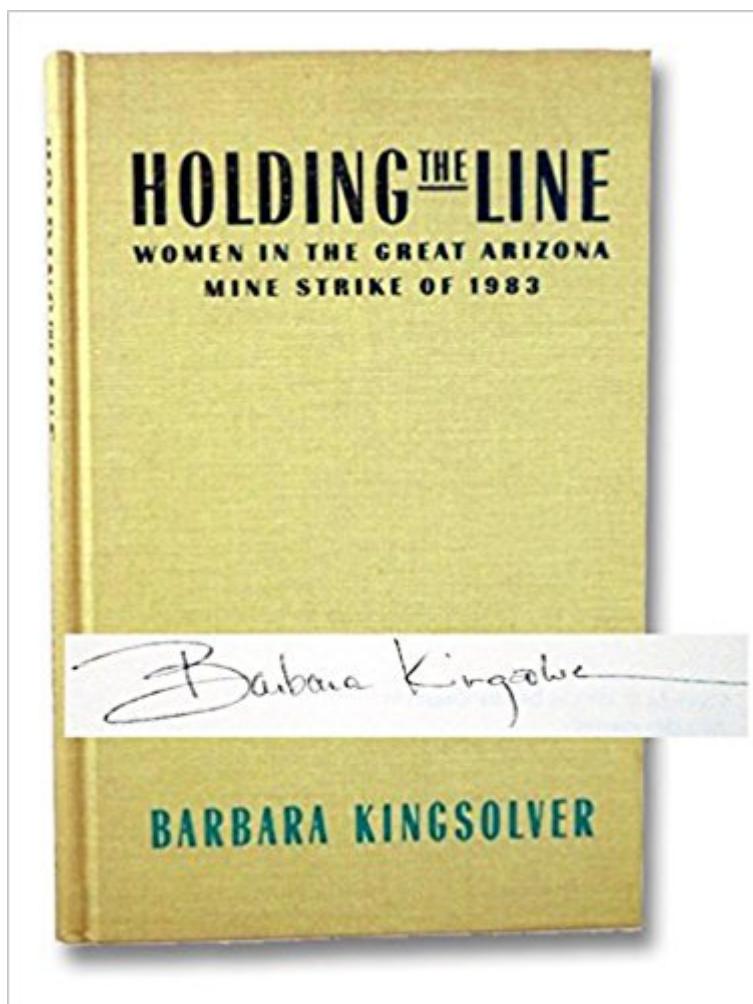


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# Holding The Line: Women In The Great Arizona Mine Strike Of 1983



## **Synopsis**

Holding the Line, Barbara Kingsolver's first non-fiction book, is the story of women's lives transformed by an a signal event. Set in the small mining towns of Arizona, it is part oral history and part social criticism, exploring the process of empowerment which occurs when people work together as a community. Like Kingsolver's award-winning novels, Holding the Line is a beautifully written book grounded on the strength of its characters. Hundreds of families held the line in the 1983 strike against Phelps Dodge Copper in Arizona. After more than a year the strikers lost their union certification, but the battle permanently altered the social order in these small, predominantly Hispanic mining towns. At the time the strike began, many women said they couldn't leave the house without their husband's permission. Yet, when injunctions barred union men from picketing, their wives and daughters turned out for the daily picket lines. When the strike dragged on and men left to seek jobs elsewhere, women continued to picket, organize support, and defend their rights even when the towns were occupied by the National Guard. "Nothing can ever be the same as it was before," said Diane McCormick of the Morenci Miners Women's Auxiliary. "Look at us. At the beginning of this strike, we were just a bunch of ladies."

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Several mining towns have grown up around the rich Morenci copper pit in southern Arizona, each ruled to a certain extent by the Phelps Dodge Copper Corporation. In 1983, the company tried to freeze wages and deny the miners cost-of-living protection. The resulting strike lasted a long and

miserable 18 months; management ultimately won its bid to have the union decertified but its business was damaged in the process, and the strikers took some comfort in a series of legal victories that, suggesting a discriminatory pattern of law enforcement, kept the labor activists out of jail. Journalist and novelist Kingsolver (*The Bean Trees*) has written a stirring partisan account of the role the area's women played in holding the strike and in keeping families and communities together, despite the strike's failure. The women tell remarkable stories of their lives and actions, displaying the strength that led one corporate official to remark, "If we could just get rid of these broads, we'd have it made." This book pays powerful tribute to their resolve and passion for economic justice. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 1983, after the Phelps Dodge Copper Corporation demanded an unprecedented amount of pay and benefits cuts, a union consortium, consisting of mostly Hispanic women, held a strike in four small Arizona mining towns. The women's lives were transformed. Their culture had confined them to limited roles; they now became leaders, strategists, spokespersons, and morale-boosters. The first-person narratives of these women dominate this account of the 18-month strike, written by novelist Kingsolver, author of *The Bean Trees* (LJ 2/1/88) and *Homeland and Other Stories* (LJ 5/15/89). While this format is interesting, fewer quotations and additional industry and strike background would have made the account more effective. Despite these reservations, the book will interest readers of labor studies, women's studies, and community/ethnic studies. - Frieda Shoenberg Rozen, Pennsylvania State Univ., University Park Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Barbara Kingsolver was a young reporter in Arizona when she was assigned to write a story about this strike. Little did she know then that the strike would last for eighteen months, and that this book would be a natural outgrowth of her interest. The book is filled with facts and figures as well as the stories of people who bravely "held the line" each day, picketing against the "scab" workers that were brought in by the Phelps Dodge Copper Corporation. It's also the story of a town, where the only work was in the mine. And it's also about the generations of Mexican American citizens of that town who had to fight prejudice as well as the everyday dangers inherent in mining. Most of all though, it is the story of the women and how this strike broadened their understanding of the world beyond their families, and let them develop new strengths. For it was mostly the women who stood on that picket line - the wives, sisters and mothers of the men who would have been arrested.

Families were threatened with eviction. There was even a catastrophic flood during this time, which brought its own kind of devastation. And some of the women were arrested too. But despite intimidation, tear gas and harassment, the community stood firm. I was particularly interested in the stories of the handful of women who actually worked in the mine. One of them had 11 children but needed the work to be able to help her husband support the family. Eight dollars an hour doesn't seem like much, but it was considered a good wage compared with \$3.00 an hour for being a secretary. Several of them described the actual work, including the heavy lifting all day long and sometimes working as many as 28 days in a row. Their male co-workers verbally harassed them. And there was no special restroom for women. Eventually though, they won respect. But when the corporation wanted to cut wages and eliminate even a cost-of-living increase, the strike started. It went on and on. Ms. Kingsolver goes into all the details. It was fascinating. It was if I was just picked up from my New York City apartment and plunked down on the picket line of a little town that had less people than one apartment building on my block. The eventual result wasn't very good for anybody though. Not in the usual sense. But by the time the author gives her own spin on the situation, including her feminist politics, I was left with a positive feeling, as was her intention. I learned things from this book. I learned about a copper mine in Arizona, the actual jobs and the people who worked there. I learned about the large and imperfect system of unions in this country. And, most of all, I learned about the strength and courage of a few special women.

The facts were illuminating and the history was very interesting. For that information, I think people should read this book. I thought the union battles had been fought in the late 1800's and early 1900's. This took place in 1983. However, I found it to be repetitive and there were too many people involved to keep their experiences clear.

Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983 by Barbara Kingsolver is too important a piece of American labor history to be reproduced with glaring typographical errors on almost every page. It looks as if the print version was digitalized by a scanner with the hiccups and sometimes it is hard to tell just how a sentence should read. Kingsolver is a first-rate writer and the story she tells is compelling. Especially at a time when labor unions are losing their membership and their voice to protect the health and safety and the livelihood of U.S. workers, this story deserves a better treatment.

First of all the Kindle version is ridiculously poorly edited. I've never seen such a poor product put to

market honestly. The account in the story had some redeeming elements in it, especially the aspects of how tough the women in the story were. However it was very union-biased and didn't quite tell a true account of both sides. Had it been more balanced I might have given it 3 stars.

This book changed my perspective and (I expect) the course of my life. Barbara Kingsolver is always real, intimate, personal. But this engaged me as a worker, aligned with other mothers and householders and members of a township (an entity we build together), as never before. Read this book. She speaks for me.

This book would be great for someone researching this issue to get a fresh perspective, but it's far from entertaining. Please don't let this review detract from her novels, which I have thoroughly enjoyed.

There were so many spelling errors in this book. It was horrible to read. Missing letters in words. It was horrible. Don't buy this book on Kindle. I should have spent five more dollars and got it on iTunes. It has a better interface than Kindle anyhow.

If you like Kingsolver you'll like this, even though it's non-fiction. It's a great story, very well told. If you're unfamiliar with her works, you might want to start with her non-fiction (Animal Dreams, Bean Trees, Pigs in Heaven, etc.). Not because this isn't as good but to enjoy her wonderful and unique voice as a writer.

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