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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Judge J. Howard Sundermann, Jr.  First Appellate District of Ohio     |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Internet Movie Database](http://www.us.imdb.com/title/tt0395972/)  [All Movie Guide](http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=1:314926)  [Readers' comments](http://docs.google.com/user_feedback.htm) |     The film graphically portrays the difficulties woman encounter in trying to achieve equal status when they go into jobs that have traditionally been exclusively male | |  | | --- | | **NORTH COUNTRY**  by Judge J. Howard Sundermann  *North Country* is about the first class action lawsuit ever filed for sexual harassment. Courtroom scenes are shown briefly at the beginning, and the film ends in a court hearing, but most of the screen time is about the events leading up to the suit. The film is loosely based on real events and a book that was written about the entire situation, but is not by any means a docu-drama, the details are fiction. The film is made in the tradition of *Silkwood* and *Norma Rae*, but unlike *Norma Rae*, there is already a union and they are one of the bad guys.  The lead character, Josie, leaves an abusive relationship and goes home to Northern Minnesota with her two children. The only job that pays decent money there is in the mines where her father works. She gets a job at the mine and connects with the few other women fellow employees. Their bosses and the men who work at the mine are hostile and clearly do not want women working there. The harassment portrayed that Josie and the other woman receive is brutal and graphic, everyone seems to be in on it. Even those who do not participate tolerate it, laugh at the crude jokes, and certainly would back their fellow workers if accusations were made.  Josie goes to her bosses to complain but does not even get a hearing. She is told to come back when you have a real problem. She also cannot convince her fellow woman workers to join her in a complaint as they say they need the job and would rather put up with the deplorable conditions than get fired. As a last resort she goes to a local lawyer who is at first reluctant to help, but finally agrees because the suit is the first of its kind.  The film graphically portrays the difficulties woman encounter in trying to achieve equal status when they go into jobs that have traditionally been exclusively male. Josie is told she is taking a job away from a man who needs it to support his family; she replies that she needs it for the same reason. The story is told totally from Josie's point of view; almost everyone else depicted is evil.  The film is very well done; it is gripping and extremely well acted. Charlize Theron plays Josie. She showed in *Monster* that she is not just another pretty face and can act, and delivers another terrific performance here. She is the underdog against the large corporation and her fellow male workers. Her father's character is particularly well performed. He works in the mine and has the same mind set as his fellow male workers about women's place in the mine, but he sees what is happening to his daughter and is caught in the middle. His speech in the union hall where he finally resolves his conflict is one of the dramatic highlights of the film.  The film does, in my view, have three flaws. First, the harassment seems a bit over the top. Every male minor is shown to be a grinning moron, who spends most of his time planning the next disgusting thing to do to the woman workers. The second problem is the court room scenes. I know that filmmakers are not there to conduct law classes but to dramatize and entertain, but these scenes take that to the limit. The film's legal advisor was either asleep, underpaid or ignored. The latitude allowed as to the sexual history of the witnesses is beyond belief. Lawyers continue to question a witness after several warnings to stop, and when the answer is badgered out of them, there is no objection and the testimony is admitted. Speeches are made rather than questions asked, and the "big dramatic moment" where people stand up for Josie is a bit far fetched. But, I have to admit, the scenes do work as film entertainment. Please leave your "Wigmore on Evidence" home when you go. The third problem is the heavy-handed political message. As the film shows terrible sexual harassment, we are shown in the background several times the televised Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill hearings. Clearly the message is that we should believe Hill. It seems to say that if any harassment is going on anywhere; then we must then believe any such charge made no matter what the motive or how unsubstantiated the evidence. But, with these asides, it is a film worth seeing.  Posted November 7, 2005 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? Please submit your comments** [**here.**](http://docs.google.com/submit-comments.htm) |  |  | | --- | | [Top of page](#gjdgxs) |  |  | | --- | | [Home](http://docs.google.com/index.html) | [Silver Screen](http://docs.google.com/silver_screen.htm) | [Small Screen](http://docs.google.com/smallscreen/small_screen.htm) | [News & Views](http://docs.google.com/newsnviews.htm) | | |