



Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization, and the UPS Strike (History of Communication)

Deepa Kumar

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When one hundred and eighty five thousand United Parcel Service (UPS) workers across the United States walked off their jobs in the fall of 1997, working class concerns became front page news. Outside the Box presents a rare, in-depth study of the media representation of this major labor struggle. Deepa Kumar delineates the background and history of the strike, how it emerged within the trajectory of the rise of neoliberal globalization, and how television networks and dominant print media portrayed the event.

Through a textual analysis of over five hundred news reports, Kumar shows how the strikers pressured a seemingly intractable media system to represent the interests of workers and thereby elevated the class contradictions at the heart of a booming economy. While UPS had made about a billion dollars in profit during the year prior to the strike, its workers had seen paltry wage increases, a steady shift from secure full-time jobs to part-time jobs, and deteriorating working conditions.

During the strike, the corporate media were forced to address working-class issues sympathetically.

However, once the strike was over, the media reverted to business as usual. Drawing on her analysis of the strike, Kumar argues that media reform is more complicated than is suggested by liberal media theorists, yet she also argues against the pessimistic currents of radical scholarship that views the media as all-powerful. Instead, she puts forward the case for a dialectical understanding, developing what she calls a “dominance/resistance model” for media analysis.

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