

A Hundred Years of Consumer Boycotts

This hour-long presentation outlines the major points covered in a new book by the speaker. The Routledge 1999 publication, entitled *Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change Through the Marketplace and the Media*, examines American involvement with consumer boycotts over the course of the 20th century.

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Despite the marked increase in the number and variety of consumer boycotts in recent years very little is known about these controversial instruments of social and economic protest; this book fills this knowledge gap by setting forth a comprehensive conceptual framework that is used to further understanding of a wide range of consumer boycotts. And, as the book makes clear, the range of consumer boycotts has indeed broadened as have the tactical approaches taken by boycott organizers.

In contrast with their turn-of-the-century emphasis on labor issues and consumer economic concerns, boycotts now focus on a large diversity of topics, including the rights of various groups (such as women, gays, and ethnic, racial and religious minorities) as well as such issues as animal welfare, environmental protection and the moral tone of television programs. Tactical changes have also shifted substantially from an emphasis on the marketplace (cutting consumer sales of boycotted goods) to one on the media (undermining the public image of the targeted firm by securing prominent news coverage of the boycotters' criticisms of the firm's policies).

The resulting changes in boycott substance and style over the years reflect larger changes in the social and economic fabric of 20th century life in America - changes that the book documents and interprets in a manner which offers new insights and understandings to a protest mechanism which is as old as the nation itself.

Endnote

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