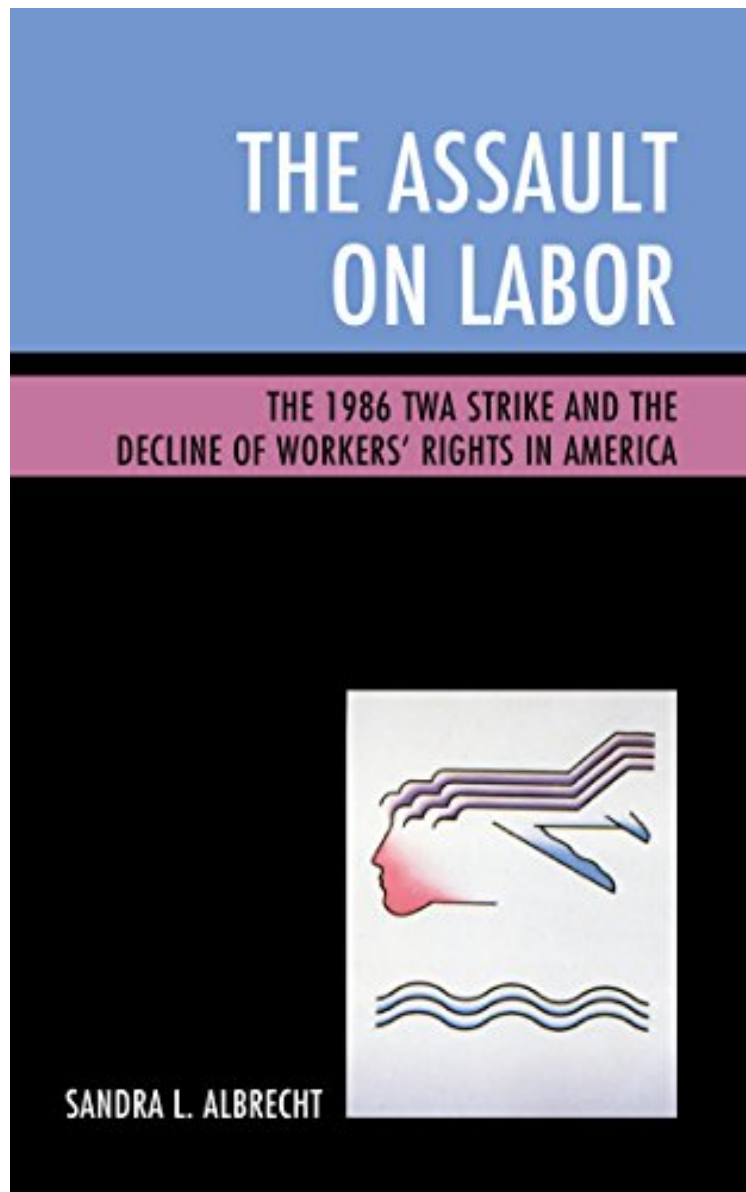


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## The Assault on Labor: The 1986 TWA Strike and the Decline of Workers' Rights in America

*Sandra L. Albrecht*

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**Sandra L. Albrecht : The Assault on Labor: The 1986 TWA Strike and the Decline of Workers' Rights in America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Assault

## on Labor: The 1986 TWA Strike and the Decline of Workers' Rights in America:

The Assault on Labor details the 1986 Independent Federation of Flight Attendants (IFFA) strike against Trans World Airlines (TWA), one of the most dramatic instances of the heightened labor conflict in the 1980s. Using extensive court, union, and company documents, The Assault on Labor shows how the expanded use of permanent replacements in labor disputes has fundamentally altered workers' legal right to strike. Set within one of the biggest corporate raids of the time, it was a strike of a predominantly female labor force that garnered respect throughout the labor movement for its solidarity and determination. Faced with the permanent replacement of over 5000 strikers, IFFA waged a three year struggle to return all workers to the line, mobilizing political, economic, and legal actions to secure their jobs and survive as a union. Despite critical successes in the courts in the aftermath of the strike, the Supreme Court would render a decision that further strengthened permanent replacements. Since the 1980s, labor's major form of protest, the right to strike, has all but disappeared.

The erosion of the size, visibility, and power of the labor movement is one of the central developments in late-20th-century US history. From a high of one-third of workers in the 1950s, union density dropped to just over 10 percent by the early 21st century. Scholars have often explained this dramatic decline by citing some combination of global economic forces, employer resistance, and the weakness of US labor law. Rarely has one book brought all of those elements together. Sociologist Albrecht (Univ. of Kansas) charts the growing employer resistance to organized labor through a study of the origins, conduct, and consequences of the 1986 strike by 6,000 flight attendants against Trans World Airlines (TWA). Eschewing simple critiques of stolid, bureaucratic union leadership or unabashed corporate greed, Albrecht shows how a combination of industry deregulation, financial and corporate restructuring, and gendered conceptions of work helped provoke a stoppage. Left vulnerable by a legal regime that allowed TWA to hire replacement workers, the ten-week strike collapsed in failure. It took nearly five years for the strikers to resume their old jobs under a new concessionary arrangement—a stinging but telling indictment of workers' diminished power in the late-20th-century US. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Graduate students/faculty.

(CHOICE)Albrecht transports us back in time to the airline industry of the 1980's and its tumultuous labor relations, telling the story of a valiant struggle by TWA's flight attendants against a corporate raider intent on breaking their spirit and their union. The author re-constructs the events surrounding this strike and provides us with an unusually detailed account of the principal actors, the negotiation process, the complicated relationships within the flight attendants union and with other labor groups, and the significant legal rulings that emerged from the strike. This is not a tale of resounding victory; the best that can be said is that the flight attendants upheld their dignity, kept their union intact, and lived on to fight another day. But even highly equivocal "victories" can inspire, especially when they occur in the face of such long odds. Albrecht's sympathetic account of the (mostly) women who carried on this struggle should appeal to those interested in an inside look at labor relations, airline industry buffs, and more generally, readers who will be heartened by seeing labor stand up to the powers that be. (David Walsh, Miami University)This book will be a positive addition to the small number of fine books that tell labor's story by focusing on particular strikes. Its legal and policy conclusions are sound. It starkly illustrates the basic unfairness of the Mackay doctrine permitting the permanent replacement of striking workers. The story is fascinating and the main characters Icahn and Frankovich are well drawn. The battle of the flight attendants for dignity and fair treatment is unique and stirring. The strikers were battling not only against corporate power but against widespread sexist assumptions that were held by TWA, and also by fellow unionists, thereby preventing needed labor solidarity. This story has never been adequately told prior to this book. (Julius Getman, University of Texas at Austin)About the AuthorSandra L. Albrecht is associate professor of sociology at the University of Kansas.