



The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business

By Nelson Lichtenstein

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The definitive account of how a small Ozarks company upended the world of business and what that change means

Wal-Mart, the world's largest company, roared out of the rural South to change the way business is done. Deploying computer-age technology, Reagan-era politics, and Protestant evangelism, Sam Walton's firm became a byword for cheap goods and low-paid workers, famed for the ruthless efficiency of its global network of stores and factories. But the revolution has gone further: Sam's protégés have created a new economic order which puts thousands of manufacturers, indeed whole regions, in thrall to a retail royalty. Like the Pennsylvania Railroad and General Motors in their heyday, Wal-Mart sets the commercial model for a huge swath of the global economy.

In this lively, probing investigation, historian Nelson Lichtenstein deepens and expands our knowledge of the merchandising giant. He shows that Wal-Mart's rise was closely linked to the cultural and religious values of Bible Belt America as well as to the imperial politics, deregulatory economics, and laissez-faire globalization of Ronald Reagan and his heirs. He explains how the company's success has transformed American politics, and he anticipates a day of reckoning, when challenges to the Wal-Mart way, at home and abroad, are likely to change the far-flung empire.

Insightful, original, and steeped in the culture of retail life, *The Retail Revolution* draws on first hand reporting from coastal China to rural Arkansas to give a fresh and necessary understanding of the phenomenon that has transformed international commerce.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Lichtenstein (*Walter Reuther*) offers a comprehensive if dry discussion of Wal-Mart—the world's largest private sector employer—and its place in the changing global economy. The author covers the company's rise from a group of tiny rural Arkansas stores to an enormous international entity, plagued by equally enormous problems: accusations of widespread sexual and racial discrimination, a history of dodging minimum wage law and unemployment claims, union-busting, destruction of smaller companies, chronic employee theft and bad publicity following the discovery of goods produced by child laborers. Though Lichtenstein speaks with bemused awe of Wal-Mart's omnipresence in commerce and culture, advanced logistics system and evangelical background, the message is that Wal-Mart—whose eerie motto Our long-term strategy is to be where we're not—has gotten too large and unwieldy to support its own weight. While it serves well as a primer on the company many Americans love to hate, the distant tone and ponderous detail will not help this book stand out from the rank and file of Wal-Mart exposés. (Aug.)

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Review

“A terrific book... Lichtenstein does a beautiful job of putting Wal-Mart in its historical context... A definitive account not only of Wal-Mart’s past but also of the forces shaping its future.”

—*Los Angeles Times*

“Offers penetrating insights... Lichtenstein sheds valuable light on the technological reasons for Wal-Mart’s success... and provides a detailed look at the dark side of the company’s employment practices.... As Lichtenstein argues, Wal-Mart may have done more than any other American institution to undermine labor regulations.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Surely the best account we have of Wal-Mart’s metamorphosis from a backwater chain to the nation’s dominant corporation... The rise of Wal-Mart, and the national economy it has shaped in its image, is a story that Lichtenstein is eminently suited to tell.”

—*The American Prospect*

“Usefully comprehensive... *The Retail Revolution* offers the best account yet of the myriad problems that Wal-Mart employees endure.”

—*The Big Money*

“Comprehensive socioeconomic history... Lichtenstein paints a convincing portrait of a multinational conglomerate willing to dehumanize people in the pursuit of profit, even as it tries to convince us that people are its No. 1 concern. A definitive survey of Wal-Mart and the company’s worldview.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Nelson Lichtenstein has written *the* book on Wal-Mart. You can read it as a sober indictment of the rogue company that happens also to be the world’s largest corporation. Or you can read it as a brilliantly reported case s....

About the Author

Nelson Lichtenstein is one of the country's leading experts on labor and politics and the editor of a much-cited collection of essays on Wal-Mart. A professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he directs the Center for the Study of Work, Labor, and Democracy, he is also the author of several highly regarded books on American history, including the award-winning *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*.

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