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Rebekah Peeples Massengill

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Wal-Mart is America's largest retailer. The national chain of stores is a powerful stand-in of both the promise and perils of free market capitalism. Yet it is also often the target of public outcry for its labor practices, to say nothing

of class-action lawsuits, and a central symbol in America's increasingly polarized political discourse over consumption, capitalism and government regulations. In many ways the battle over Wal-Mart is the battle between "Main Street" and "Wall Street" as the fate of workers under globalization and the ability of the private market to effectively distribute precious goods like health care take center stage.

"For years Wal-Mart and its critics have been locked in a high-profile contest to define the meaning and calculate the morality of America's largest private-sector employer. Rebekah Massengill brings a sophisticated understanding of language, culture, and ideology to her deconstruction of the rhetoric and symbolism deployed by the contestants, in the process demonstrating that concepts like family, community, fairness, and citizenship are both highly malleable and explosively political." -Nelson Lichtenstein, author of *The Retail Revolution*

Massengill, a lecturer in the department of sociology at Princeton, uses the debate over Wal-Mart's policies and economic standing as a way of exploring the moral language used in larger political and economic discussions, such as health care. The book effectively demonstrates the deep intellectual divisions between progressives and conservatives." -Publishers Weekly

"Well researched, tightly argued, and accessibly written, *Wal-Mart Wars* offers insight for everyone." -CHOICE

"In her insightful and finely wrought study, Rebekah Peeples Massengill uses public debate over the virtues and failings of Walmart to examine the moral tensions inherent in modern capitalism. Her analysis offers insights concerning the moral underpinnings of economic discourse, the diffusion of group claims in the public sphere, the rhetorical centrality of the American family in conservative populism, and the shortcomings of progressive advocacy." -Social Forces

"*Wal-Mart Wars* is a beautifully-written, clear-minded inquiry into one of the most important questions of our time: Do powerful corporate entities operate simply according to value-free conceptions of the marketplace, or can consumers and advocacy groups bring standards of moral worth into the picture? Rebekah Peeples Massengill provides a careful analysis of the grassroots arguments actually being used. This is a brilliant example of cultural sociology at its best." -Robert Wuthnow, author of *Remaking the Heartland: Middle America Since the 1950s*

"[Rhetoric] always registers the moral foundations of the culture that sponsors it, reflecting, reinforcing, and even reimagining them. This is the terrain of Rebekah Peeples Massengill's perceptive new study of the political contests in the United States over the role and behavior of the giant retailing corporation, Wal-Mart. She wishes to understand the uses made of moral language and categories by disputants on both sides of the Wal-Mart controversies, and, in particular, how these uses differentially relate to moral conceptions of the market. She also argues that the case study illustrates general moralizing processes in public debates about markets in the United States, as in such cases as health care reform, tax reform, and government bailouts of major corporations. Generally, then, it is an examination of how Americans make sense of the 'moral dilemmas of modern capitalism.'" -Peter Cleary Yeager, *Political Science Quarterly*

"This excellent book will convert those who still think that economy is devoid of meanings, judgments and emotions. *Wal-Mart Wars* is an important contribution to the growing scholarship on markets and morals, and a must-read for anyone who cares about how and why Americans argue about economic issues." -Nina Bandelj, author of *Economy and State: A Sociological Perspective*

"This is first-rate sociology, deftly packaged to offer insight for both academic and popular audiences. Social advocacy groups would do well to look to Massengill's findings for advice on crafting their messages on economic issues." -Library Journal

About the Author: Rebekah Peeples Massengill is Lecturer in the Writing Program at Princeton University.