

Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses

By Stacy Mitchell

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In less than two decades, large retail chains have become the most powerful corporations in America. In this deft and revealing book, Stacy Mitchell illustrates how mega-retailers are fueling many of our most pressing problems, from the shrinking middle class to rising pollution and diminished civic engagement—and she shows how a growing number of communities and independent businesses are effectively fighting back.

Mitchell traces the dramatic growth of mega-retailers—from big boxes like Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Costco, and Staples to chains like Starbucks, Olive Garden, Blockbuster, and Old Navy—and the precipitous decline of independent businesses. Drawing on examples from virtually every state in the country, she unearths the extraordinary impact of these companies and the big-box mentality on everything from soaring gasoline consumption to rising poverty rates, failing family farms, and declining voting levels. Along the way, Mitchell exposes the shocking role government policy has played in the expansion of mega-retailers and builds a compelling case that communities composed of many small, locally owned businesses are healthier and more prosperous than those dominated by a few large chains.

More than a critique, *Big-Box Swindle* provides an invigorating account of how some communities have successfully countered the spread of big boxes and rebuilt their local economies. Since 2000, more than two hundred big-box development projects have been halted by groups of ordinary citizens, and scores of towns and cities have adopted laws that favor small-scale, local business development and limit the proliferation of chains. From cutting-edge land-use policies to innovative cooperative small-business initiatives, Mitchell offers communities concrete strategies that can stave off mega-retailers and create a more prosperous and sustainable future.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Mitchell, chair of the American Independent Business Alliance, has produced a compelling indictment of Wal-Mart and other "big box" stores, based on numerous national examples. Deep-pocketed chains like Home Depot flood the market to drive out competition, she points out, then advertise some products at or below cost, while most other products may offer no better value than at independent stores. Meanwhile, she argues, independent businesses not only return profits to local communities and remain more civic-minded and accountable, but offer resiliency rooted in diversity, in contrast to the big-box "monocrop." She even provides evidence that Wal-Mart lowers, rather than boosts community economic well-being, and that firms with fewer than 100 employees give twice as much in charity per employee as those with more than 500 workers. Mitchell challenges Chris Anderson's Long Tail theory, suggesting that an indie bookseller's passion about a product can be more critical to its sales than wide access via a Web retailer. Mitchell catalogues diverse ways indie-minded consumers can fight back, by campaigning against government subsidies to big-box stores, and advocating for sales tax collection on Internet sales and stronger antitrust enforcement. Visible citizens' coalitions can fight big-box expansion, especially if communities fine-tune their land use policies. The big-box trend, she suggests, can be countered by increasing public awareness. *(Nov.)*
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From Booklist
Across the U.S., large retail chain stores have created a monoculture of automobile-based shopping, driving out independently owned businesses and decimating downtown shopping districts. The numbers are staggering--Wal-Mart, the big gorilla, now receives 10 percent of American's spending dollars, and Home Depot gobbles up nearly half of all home-improvement sales. Mitchell, an advisor to communities on retail development and independent business, compares these companies' tactics to European colonialism--they enter a community and plunder its resources, rather than adding value and enhancing the local economy. Gobbling up land, creating sprawl, and even knocking down historical landmarks in their quest for total dominance, these powerful corporations let nothing stand in their way. From shrinking the middle class to diminishing culture and landscape, the effects of the big-box retailers are far reaching, but Mitchell has uncovered a movement to curb the proliferation of the megaretailers and create policies that favor local enterprises. Her call to action reveals the hidden costs of those "low prices" promoted by the big-box bullies and gives hope to local entrepreneurs and concerned citizens alike. *David Siegfried*
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Review
Prodigiously researched, lucidly written.—Marilyn Harris, *BusinessWeek's SmallBiz*

"A compelling indictment of Wal-Mart and other 'big box' stores, based on numerous national examples."—*Publishers Weekly*

"Here is the definitive indictment of Wal-Mart and its ilk: how local retailers, family farmers, factory workers and democracy itself have been steamrolled by the illusion of big-box progress. Deftly weaving history, sociology and a crash course on retail economics with affectionate snapshots of tenacious entrepreneurs, Mitchell leaves us with an optimistic vision informed by promising new community initiatives."—Greg LeRoy, author of *The Great American Jobs Scam* and executive director of *Good Jobs*

First

"In the muckraking tradition of *Fast Food Nation*, this is a searing indictment of the impact of behemoth retailers . . . It illuminates a stunning collection of business outrages, government favoritism, environmental damages, hidden economic and societal costs, debunked myths and a rising sweel of consumer activism against big-box blight . . . *Big-Box Swindle* takes mega-retailers to task in convincing fashion. But Mitchell also provides inspiring lessons from places that are turing the tide." —John Marshall, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, which included *Big-Box Swindle* in its Top Ten 2006 list

"What *Nickel and Dimed* did for the Wal-Mart worker, Mitchell does for the community threatened by mega-retailers." —Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*

"Through rich, real-life stories, Stacy Mitchell reveals that those 'low prices' so proudly promoted by big-box behemoths come at an intolerably high cost to our communities and culture. Can we beat the behemoths? Yes! And Mitchell shows us the way. Read on, take heart, and take action!"—Jim Hightower, national radio commentator, writer, public speaker, and best-selling author

"Stacy Mitchell provides an astonishing exposé of the broad-reaching implications of our shopping habits. *Big-Box Swindle* should be required reading for everyone who cares about America's main streets, as well as a call to arms for small businesses everywhere to organize and take action."—Kennedy Smith, former director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center

"A well-researched and frightening book about an economic pandemic engulfing the United States . . . The big boxes are draining cities and towns of money and bankrupting neighborhood businesses that have long been the backbone of American communities. *Big-Box Swindle* is a book every citizen needs to read."—Ben H. Bagdikian, author of *The New Media Monopoly*

"A great read! The big-box shadow looms over us mightily, but, as Stacy Mitchell documents, hundreds of communities have already saved themselves. She tells us how they did it and firmly invites us to step forward into the light. Change-a-lujah!"—Reverend Billy, leader of the Church of Stop Shopping

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Elnora Perry:

What do you with regards to book? It is not important with you? Or just adding material when you want something to explain what yours problem? How about your spare time? Or are you busy person? If you don't have spare time to do others business, it is gives you the sense of being bored faster. And you have extra time? What did you do? Every person has many questions above. They should answer that question since just their can do this. It said that about publication. Book is familiar on every person. Yes, it is suitable. Because start from on jardín de infancia until university need this specific Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses to read.

Walter Goodwin:

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Ross Larson:

Reading can called thoughts hangout, why? Because when you are reading a book particularly book entitled Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each aspect that maybe unknown for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging every single word written in a reserve then become one web form conclusion and explanation which maybe you never get ahead of. The Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses giving you another experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful details for your better life on this era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished studying it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

Laura Clark:

This Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses is new way for you who has attention to look for some information as it relief your hunger details. Getting deeper you onto it getting knowledge more you know or else you who still having little bit of digest in reading this Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses can be the light food in your case because the information inside this particular book is easy to get by simply anyone. These books build itself in the form which can be reachable by anyone, yes I mean in the e-book web form. People who think that in reserve form make them feel tired even dizzy this book is the answer. So there is absolutely no in reading a publication especially this one. You can find what you are looking for. It should be here for anyone. So , don't miss this! Just read this e-book kind for your better life and also knowledge.

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