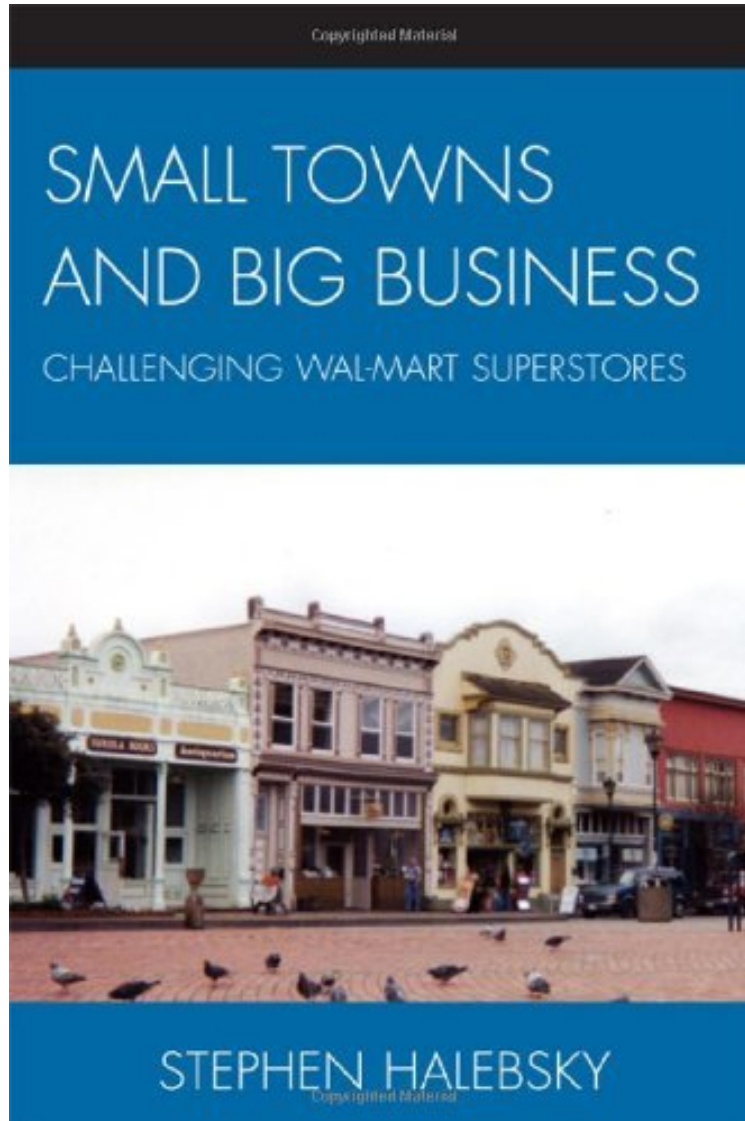


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# Small Towns and Big Business: Challenging Wal-Mart Superstores

*Stephen Halebsky*

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**Stephen Halebsky : Small Towns and Big Business: Challenging Wal-Mart Superstores** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Small Towns and Big Business: Challenging Wal-Mart Superstores:

During the 1990s, a new type of controversy began occurring across the United States: controversies over the siting of superstores, also known as big box stores. In these disputes, which often involve Wal-Mart, the world's biggest

retailer, local citizens mount organized opposition to the proposed siting of a superstore in their town or neighborhood. Opponents criticize Wal-Mart superstores for putting local independent merchants out of business, siphoning money from the local economy, providing substandard jobs, disrupting residential neighborhoods, contributing to the "McDonaldization" of society, inducing sprawl, destroying downtowns and Main Streets, and undermining local uniqueness and small town charm. More generally, these David-and-Goliath controversies represent particularly stark examples of the conflict of interests between local communities and large corporations that have become common in contemporary society. *Small Towns and Big Business* uses fieldwork and archival sources to comprehensively examine these controversies and the underlying issues. While Wal-Mart is usually able to site its stores at its preferred locations, in some cases local opponents have been able to thwart its plans. Using detailed case studies of anti-superstore controversies in six small cities in five states, Halebsky employs a comparative-historical approach to construct an explanation of how some of these local social movements managed to prevail against Wal-Mart. This explanation is then extended to provide the basis for a model of the general conditions under which local communities may be able to constrain unwanted corporate action. Thus, this is both a study of social movement outcomes and an investigation of community-corporate conflict. *Small Towns and Big Business* provides insight into the potential of the local state to control large corporations, the inherently problematic nature of corporate retailing, the possibilities for resisting McDonaldization, and the fate of local anti-corporation acts

In a manner that will appeal to local activists, social scientists, and everyone affected by superstores, and with a judicious mix of on-site interviews, archival research, and keen theorizing, Halebsky produces a powerful argument for the importance of social movements at the community level engaging with the local state in anti-corporate struggles. Now that the voters of the USA have elected a one-time community organizer as President, perhaps we will see more successful outcomes. Leslie Sklairrr (Leslie Sklair, emeritus professor of sociology, London School of Economics)Halebsky's analysis of the existing literature is first rate, as he concisely and clearly weaves together several existing research areas to locate the controversies he examines within the appropriate context. . . . The theoretical work that he has done in combination with the solid empirical evidence he provides should advance the efforts of students and social movements and community development alike. (*American Journal of Sociology*, Spring 2010)Wal-Mart discussions by planners and social scientists have fragmented over the years into claims that are more political and cultural than observations based on systematic research. Stephen Halebsky helps to remedy our present knowledge with his thorough discussion. Challenging superstores means more than a fight between the 'little people' and powerful global corporations exploiting economies of scale and cheap foreign labor. Halebsky shows how this relationship also involves the local state and how its powers can be an aid in ameliorating negative effects. His book contextualizes responses to superstores as occurring within a realm of almost absolute power exercised by global corporations. Do we want this power to be extended to retailing? Limiting consumer choices is one result. More importantly, Halebsky's book shows how the fight against superstores is really about the battle against low wages, poor job benefits, a lack of the union option, and the persisting exploitation of American workers. (Mark Gottdiener, University at Buffalo)In a manner that will appeal to local activists, social scientists, and everyone affected by superstores, and with a judicious mix of on-site interviews, archival research, and keen theorizing, Halebsky produces a powerful argument for the importance of social movements at the community level engaging with the local state in anti-corporate struggles. Now that the voters of the USA have elected a one-time community organizer as President, perhaps we will see more successful outcomes. Leslie Sklair (Leslie Sklair, emeritus professor of sociology, London School of Economics)About the AuthorStephen Halebsky is assistant professor of sociology at S.U.N.Y.-Cortland.