



Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart

Liza Featherstone

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On television, Wal-Mart employees are smiling women delighted with their jobs. But reality is another story. In 2000, Betty Dukes, a fifty-two-year-old black woman in Pittsburg, California, became the lead plaintiff in *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores*, a class action, representing 1.6 million women. In her explosive investigation of this historic lawsuit, journalist Liza Featherstone reveals how Wal-Mart, a self-styled "family-oriented," Christian company: Deprives women (but not men) of the training they need to advance. Relegates women to lower-paying jobs like selling baby clothes, reserving the more lucrative positions for men. Inflicts punitive demotions on employees who object to discrimination. Exploits Asian women in its sweatshops in Saipan, a U.S. commonwealth. Featherstone goes on to reveal the creative solutions that Wal-Mart workers around the country have found, like fighting for unions, living-wage ordinances, and childcare options. *Selling Women Short* combines the personal stories of these employees with superb investigative journalism to show why women who work these low-wage jobs are getting a raw deal, and what they are doing about it. A new preface to the paperback edition will reflect on Wal-Mart's response to this lawsuit and its critics—including this one.

Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart Details

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Grace says

This excellent, interview-based book follows the case of *Dukes v. Wal-Mart*, the gigantic class-action suit brought against Wal-Mart by its female employees. Journalist Featherstone talks to what have to be a hundred current and former Wal-Mart employees, managers, lawyers, etc. in her effort to get the whole story, and the story isn't pretty. The picture painted is one of institutional discrimination against women on a scale of over a million. The discrimination permeates all levels at Wal-Mart, with women making less than men for the same jobs, being sexually harassed, and all of the usual crimes. The thing that makes Wal-Mart different, though (or at least this is the case the prosecution will be making) is that the policy of discrimination is not limited to a given man, or a given store, but to the entire, huge company. As women fight their ways up the management ranks at Wal-Mart, things get worse rather than better, and eventually nearly all women top out. For all of its rhetoric about being woman-friendly and family-friendly, Wal-Mart does worse by women than any other company its size.

The strength of Featherstone's book is on two counts. The first is her persuasive rhetoric and extensive interviewing, the second is her focus. Featherstone largely allows the women involved in the case to speak for themselves as to their treatment at Wal-Mart, and their stories provide a very strong foundation for the institutional statistics she provides, but doesn't bore you with. Giving Wal-Mart management their say, she also talks extensively to current and former high level Wal-Marters, and quotes from the testimony that has already been heard in the pre-trial motions for the case. While her sympathy to the protestants is obvious, she seems a decent journalist in at least trying to get the other side of the story. Such as it is.

As opposed to other anti-Wal-Mart pieces, such as *The High Cost of Low Prices*, Featherstone focuses her work not on everything that is wrong with the company, but specifically on its sexism. While she does end up arguing that unionization will do more for Wal-Mart's female employees than this lawsuit or anything else that may come along, she spends most of the book focusing on the specific problems of female Wal-Mart workers, and given how much information is available just on that one subject, this is a good call. Though the discrimination of women at Wal-Mart does tie into other problems with the company (hypocritical conservative moralism, poor treatment of workers), it is refreshing to see a focus on women, and to see Featherstone's academic rigor in defining her subject.

Overall, this book is the best piece I've seen or read on the evil that is Wal-Mart. While it misses whole huge problems with what Wal-Mart does (like the conditions of overseas workers, for example), it does a wonderful job with the issue that it does take up, which is one of the ones that I'm most concerned with as a feminist. I'd highly recommend it.

McKenzie Richardson says

A compelling account of *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.* in which Featherstone documents the case and provides insight into some of the experiences of the women involved in the case as well as other Wal-Mart employees. Accounts range from sexist wage discrepancies to lack of advertising of job openings to derogatory language and sexual harassment.

This is a very readable book with a lot of information. Featherstone focuses on the case and the people involved, but also rounds out the text with related subject matter such as the role of consumer support in such cases, union involvement, and the benefits and limitations of class action suits.

I think Featherstone balanced the book well by focusing on Wal-Mart's female employees, but also noting the low pay of many male employees who also do not make a living wage.

This book demonstrates how sexism and discrimination are still prevalent in society and the downside of big corporation's control over communities.

Though the book was originally published in 2004, the messages are still important to society.

This book is well written with many examples of the discrimination female employees faced working for Wal-Mart. It is a powerful tale of people taking a stand against injustice.

Regardless of the eventual end of the appeal process in the Supreme Court in 2011, this book and the case itself raised a lot of awareness to the injustices still going on in this country. This book is an eye opening account of some of the discrimination and inequality of one of America's biggest corporations.

Jess says

A very informative and factual book on Wal-Mart. Featherstone has taken a lot of the essays in this book and used them in nationally printed newspaper and magazine articles.

Kristen says

Liza Featherstone's *Selling Women Short: The Landmark Battle for Workers' Rights at Wal-Mart* was read for WST 101 Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies.

Lisa Findley says

It's good to have a coherent argument and a strong file of facts to back up why I don't shop at Wal-Mart and why it's bad for its employees and just about everyone in America. This book makes it easy to understand one major aspect of Wal-Mart's horrendous labor practices, through the prism of sexism, racism, and class exploitation, and how the case of Dukes vs. Wal-Mart highlights those issues and forces some changes within the company as well as within the country's perception of the company. Don't just be the elitist snob who doesn't get the real Americans who shop and work at Wal-Mart--read this book and band together with the real Americans who want to make it possible to earn a living wage and promotions at Wal-Mart.

•*•.suprasixxcinco.•*• says

Very factual, but doesn't really read like a book.

Craig says

I implore you: do not shop here, ever. Discrimination is so systemic in this company, the only way that things will ever change is if we collectively hit it in the pocketbook and the workers organize. Walmart cloaks itself in this idea of All-Americanism. But how American is it to deliberately hold the worker down? Or maybe the question should be, is that what we want America to be?

Lauren says

Obviously, since this was published in 2005, the status of the case has changed. The fact that Wal-Mart is a horrible place with horrible business practices, though, remains the same.

Laura says

Journalism and not literature, but definitely compelling. Be forewarned that you will never be able to walk into a Walmart without having an enormously guilty conscience and feeling utterly ashamed of yourself ever again. You will simply have to accept paying full price for your coffee, pepto, and Luna bars somewhere else.

Joanna says

Eh.. Everyone knows Walmart is "bad". This book just rehashed it. It read more like a thesis paper then a book.

Susan says

Inspiring account of real-life women with real-life problems who decide they're not going to be abused anymore; they're going to fight. Reading this makes it impossible to enter a Wal-Mart ever again.

Sarah says

Will make you never step foot in a Wal-Mart again.

Tieya says

WOW... This is something I think everyone should read. This shows you the snowball effect. Very sad, this stuff makes me so mad. I would hope that people would be able to read between the lines and know that what you are told it not always the truth. Not saying that everything in this book is or is not but it will make you think and pass on the news or the book. There is allot on movies and books about this kind of stuff. YUCK!!! I would also like to say that for a very long time I shopped at Wal-Mart and I loved it. I thought I was getting such a great deal and did all the shopping I could at Wal-Mart. For some years now I have read things and watch movies about this company and many others and well I have stop supporting the immoral companies like this. I could go on for a long time but will not. So I hope that you read it and will learn something new.

Tiffany says

Might make you re-think shopping at Wal-Mart....it MIGHT!

Carrie says

Important read, but the writing style was a little weak.
