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# Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life Of Garbage



## Synopsis

Eat a take-out meal, buy a pair of shoes, or read a newspaper, and you're soon faced with a bewildering amount of garbage. The United States is the planet's number-one producer of trash. Each American throws out 4.5 pounds daily. But garbage is also a global problem; the Pacific Ocean is today six times more abundant with plastic waste than zooplankton. How did we end up with this much rubbish, and where does it all go? Journalist and filmmaker Heather Rogers answers these questions by taking readers on a grisly, oddly fascinating tour through the underworld of garbage. Said to "read like a thriller" (Library Journal), *Gone Tomorrow* excavates the history of rubbish handling from the 1800s to the present, pinpointing the roots of today's waste-addicted society. With a "lively authorial voice" (New York Press), Rogers draws connections between modern industrial production, consumer culture, and our throwaway lifestyle. She also investigates controversial topics like the politics of recycling and the export of trash to poor countries, while offering a potent argument for change.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Americans produce the most waste of any people on Earth, says Rogers, but few of us ever think about where all that trash goes. Rogers endeavors to show the inner workings of the waste stream, from the garbage truck to the landfill, incinerator or parts unknown. She points out that recycling, once touted as an environmental lifesaver, "has serious flaws," and has done little to mitigate garbage's long history of environmental damage. Rogers also includes chapters on the history of

waste removal and disposal, highlighting early sanitation efforts in New York City, as well as the multi-billion-dollar, multinational business of garbage. Consistently engaging, the book delineates the myriad problems caused by the country's waste output, but offers very few concrete examples of what readers can do to improve the garbage situation; instead, Rogers stoically acknowledges that "while consumers making choices with the environment in mind is a good thing, it is in no way a real solution to our trash woes." Nevertheless, the book is an intriguing look into an often misunderstood and overlooked industry. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

**\*Starred Review\*** America leads the world in garbage, and that is nothing to be proud of. A clear-thinking and peppery writer, Rogers presents a galvanizing exposé of how we became the planet's trash monsters. Americans were ingeniously thrifty until industrialization ushered in consumer culture and the age of disposable goods and built-in obsolescence. But once the public was exhorted to buy stuff whether they needed it or not--and Rogers provides many eye-opening examples of corporate strategies and propaganda--new forms of garbage began to pile up and break down into toxic substances. Rogers details everything that is wrong with today's wasteful packaging, bogus recycling, and flawed landfills and incinerators. Here, too, is the inside story of the plastic revolution and the irresponsibly wasteful beverage market, the Mafia's involvement in commercial waste, and the illegal overseas shipping of garbage, especially toxic e-waste--trashed computers and cell phones. Rogers exhibits black-belt precision in her assault on American corporations that succeed in "greenwashing" the public while remaining "hell-bent on ever-expanding production no matter what the ecological toll." Set this beside Elizabeth Royte's *Garbage Land* (2005), and contemplate Rogers' dictum: garbage "never really goes away." Donna Seaman  
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When I purchased this book, I thought it might add to my store of trivia knowledge, sort of a fun little look at something most of us never think about. I expected to describe it with words like "nifty." This book was not what I expected, and I'm glad. This book was an engrossing discussion of how the nature and quantity of consumer garbage (as opposed to industrial waste) has changed. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution and moving up through today, this book considers the ways in which government policy and the corporate profit motive create a society in which garbage - lots and lots of garbage - is inevitable, and why even the best-intentioned efforts at recycling barely make a dent in

the mountain of trash. I have a professional background in economics, and so I got a great deal out of some of Rogers' arguments that were based in economic theory. However, her simple, straightforward style makes it easy for anyone to follow her reasoning. The subtitle, *The Hidden Life of Garbage*, was misleading. Perhaps a better subtitle might have been *The History and Social Implications of Garbage*. Although that sounds a bit scholarly, this book, while extremely well researched, did not read at all like a textbook. Rather it was an approachable discussion of why garbage occurs and why the current solutions are not working. A must-read for anyone who cares about planet Earth, whether they are chaining themselves to trees or just recycling their soda can!

This book is honest and what I mean by that is that it looks at the impacts of waste and concepts to remove it. Some might suggest that recycling works but that is not always the case because if the industry does not purchase recycled products then it just creates a sub industry. There are not that many books that will admit that a given product can only be recycled a given number of times (plastics are referenced in it). The book could use a bit more updating because it does not mention other aspects but that might simply be due to size constraints. For example when it references ewaste it does not fully explain that some major retailers offer recycling. Infact with given commodity prices some might actually pay people to take it away. The book does drop the ball a bit on RoHS. The RoHS concept of course attempts to eliminate lead from electronics but this is controversial as the replacements for it do not always conduct power the same way. This has resulted in the so called "red ring of death" with Microsoft Xbox 2 as well as created higher prices which some might argue are a form of class warfare. It does note that solutions for problems create their own problems. Horses as a means of transit meant animal wastes all over the place. Cars replaced that with their own wastes. Likewise we should be careful that we do not have future issues. Incandescent light bulbs are horrid in terms of power consumption as most of the output is not in light but as heat. LED's produce much less heat and last longer but if it is used as a traffic light during the winter it can be rendered useless.

This book is easy to read, flows very well and clearly outlines its' content and case-by-case accounts. . Excellent resource for any student studying the impact garbage has on our environment - it was required reading for an Environmental Science college class and it would definitely meet the needs of most similar class curriculum's (i.e. Sustainability etc). It's also a personal eye-opener for anyone wondering where our trash goes and how corporations should take responsibility regarding their 'trash'. As human populations explode, one day there will be more billions of tons of trash

with no place to put it and the very real problem of disposing of such (especially non-biodegradable items) will be an epidemic concern. You owe it to yourself to read this book.

I found the free Kindle sample fascinating despite the author's flair for using creepy words, so I ordered a used paperback copy of this book. Most people probably don't give enough thought to reducing the waste they produce and don't think about where their garbage winds up. Unfortunately, after the informative beginning, the book turns into what is often a political rant. The author takes a dim view of capitalism as a whole and certain groups in particular. One especially offensive example is in chapter 8 where the author blames local residents (residents!) for the eventual export of New York City's garbage to other sites after the gigantic Fresh Kills Landfill near their neighborhoods finally ran out of space. At 2,200 acres, once the largest man-made structure in the world and visible from orbit, and having served as NYC's main garbage dump for over 50 years, I'd say those particular residents had served their time hosting the enormous dump. And she doesn't mince words: "...Staten Island's majority white and Republican residents... shed their putrefying, filthy burden onto less politically powerful rural areas. They also shoved the mess onto neighborhoods..." What? After over 50 years and 2,200 acres of garbage nearby? The residents themselves got shovels and "shoved the mess"? Come on. This rant is very unfair and extreme, and was a total turn-off imo. The valid concerns she expresses about the waste problems we face would be better taken without the political bluster. All in all, there are much better books available if you want to learn more about how our garbage is handled and ways to reduce it.

A must read for every consumer. An excellent historical summary of trash. Forces one to reevaluate our current system and demand greater accountability not only from ourselves but more importantly from the industries that are selling our future for profit.

I'd recommend this to anyone going into the field of conservation, waste management, or even if you just want to be more informed. If everyone in the country read this, the U.S. would be a much cleaner place.

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