



GARBOLGY

Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash



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Edward Humes

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A Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist takes readers on a surprising tour of America’s biggest export, our most prodigious product, and our greatest legacy: our trash.

The average American produces 102 tons of garbage across a lifetime and \$50 billion in squandered riches are rolled to the curb each year. But our bins are just the starting point for a strange, impressive, mysterious, and costly journey that may also represent the greatest untapped opportunity of the century.

In *Garbology*, Edward Humes investigates trash—what’s in it; how much we pay for it; how we manage to create so much of it; and how some families, communities, and even nations are finding a way back from waste to discover a new kind of prosperity. Along the way , he introduces a collection of garbage denizens unlike anyone you’ve ever met: the trash-tracking detectives of MIT, the bulldozer-driving sanitation workers building Los Angeles’ Garbage Mountain landfill, the artists residing in San Francisco’s dump, and the family whose annual trash output fills not a dumpster or a trash can, but a single mason jar.

Garbology reveals not just what we throw away, but who we are and where our society is headed. Waste is the one environmental and economic harm that ordinary working Americans have the power to change—and prosper in the process.

Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash Details

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From Reader Review Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash for online ebook

Jared says

Wow, when I logged in to Goodreads to post my review after reading this book I was shocked to see all the 5 and 4 star ratings. When I read the introduction, I was really fascinated. But, in the end I didn't care for this book at all. Did it have some interesting facts? yes. Did it have some interesting anecdotes? sure. But, overall, it was a 20 page manuscript turned into a 300 page book. For me it just dragged on and on and on. There are just so many ways you can say the same thing over and over and over. Now, having said all that, it does have some good points. It does motivate you to reduce your footprint. I liked the message of the book, but it just dragged on far too long for me.

Jen says

Required reading for anyone who makes trash (so ... everyone). A very readable study of our garbage addiction: why we make it, where it goes, and what alternatives there might be. Full of frightening facts and inspiring suggestions, I don't think anyone could read this book and not make some changes. (I now haul home all our work food scraps for my personal compost.) Humes isn't preachy or overly moralistic: he presents the facts, and you can take care of the judgments yourself. This is a wake-up call that is long overdue.

Rebecca Scaglione says

Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash by Edward Humes is a book that has changed my life. Honestly. I ran across this book at the library and picked it up since it looked interesting.

I have always been into recycling, but this book opened by eyes to the waste that surrounds us, and how recycling is only a teeeeeeeensy piece of a solution.

Here are some of the things I learned from Pulitzer Prize Winner Edward Humes:

One out of every 6 large trucks in America is a garbage truck

America has 5% of the population, but gives off 25% of the world's waste

Across our lifetime, Americans produce 102 TONS of trash

Ancient Greeks were the first to have a dump, as opposed to just throwing the trash out their windows onto the streets

There's a national trash Olympics (but that was nowhere to be found once I googled it)

While companies say that switching from glass bottles to plastic bottles is cheaper, they're not being honest.

It IS cheaper – for them! Not for the consumer, who ultimately is the person who pays the higher price

The fish that are a major part of the food market are eating toxic plastic at 24,000 tons per year (just in the North Pacific). Gross. Jason Mraz (who I LOVE) posted this on his website that is worth checking out and is really easy to understand: Oceans of Garbage: Why People are Eating Their Own Trash

The UN estimates that 7 million tons of trash ends up in the oceans, 80% of that being plastic

Trash Track - We know how we get our products, but what happens once they are trashed? Trash Track actually follows trash to its destinations, some traveling many, many miles just to be recycled, therefore outweighing the value of that recycling

The Army, during WWII, analyzed their trash, found out what soldiers ate and threw away, and saved 2.5 million pounds of food per day when they revamped their menus

The ChicoBag from birth to present – Shocked by the amount of plastic bags fluttering around a landfill, Andy Keller created this reusable bag that folds up teensy! I have a brown one I keep in my purse!

Plastic bag fact: Tying them into knots helps them from blowing all around on a landfill, garbage truck, etc, and into the oceans, streets, playgrounds. . .

The Zero Waste Home tells Bea Johnson's story (described in Garbology) as a woman who helped turn her entire family's trash into something that fits inside a mason jar. While she does go to extremes, her tips helped me do a little revamping of my own!

Only 120 pages in and already filling the book with sticky notes!

My new goals to reduce my carbon footprint? (Linked to my Amazon purchases)

Use mesh produce bags in addition to the cloth bags I use for groceries.

Cut out paper towels by using cloth napkins and cloth dishrags

My husband and I are going to try to use a shave bar instead of regular shaving cream, since it's supposed to last much longer – I'll follow up later on to let you know how this goes!

Say no to free gifts – no taking pens, pencils, magnets, etc. from advertisers

Use every free piece of paper front and back before recycling

Think about my purchases and my trash in order to make myself more aware of what I'm doing

Follow Bea's website to see if I can glean more tips from her that I can easily incorporate into my lifestyle

Those are in addition to the things I already do, like recycle, try to waste less, turn on the fans instead of lowering the AC, doing laundry and the dishwasher loads only when full, and so on. I'm not going to stop doing the things I enjoy or buying items, but I can do some little things to just reduce the amount of waste I put into this world.

Jason Mraz is trying to lessen his carbon footprint with his organization, Tree is a Four Letter Word (a wordplay on his cd, Love is a Four Letter Word).

What is something you do, or will start to do, to help lessen your carbon footprint?

Thanks for reading,

Rebecca @ Love at First Book

Hadrian says

Incisive journalist's overview of the problems of overconsumption and waste. Terrifying description of the Plastic Garbage Island of the Pacific and offers an interesting and firm refutation of official consumption

figures. 102 tons per person per lifetime - rather scary stuff.

Now some of the worst offenders in the US are going away - newspapers and phone books, which consist of the majority of paper waste, are rapidly declining in circulation - there has been a decline in that regard. The incredible majority of things we throw away can be reused or composed or recycled, and it'll be cheaper. Legislation can only go so far, and it's been stiffly opposed in America. There has to be a shift in attitudes away from the consumer-based model. Good luck with that, though.

Makes garbage interesting and makes you want to do something about it.

EDIT: It seems Hawaii has moved towards a plastic bag ban, effective this July - so there ARE laws in the US after all.

<http://positive-press-daily.tumblr.co...>

Chad says

I have this habit of thumbing through the new books in my campus library while waiting for lunch to heat up in the microwave located there. I came across this book like this, read a couple lines, and checked it out. I read the introduction while eating lunch and was immediately fascinated. Having not given much thought to how much trash I personally make and where it goes (I mistakenly thought it just decomposes in the landfill), Garbology opened my eyes to how wasteful our society is.

I could gush about the strong writing and the shocking stories and data throughout the book, but I think the best way to judge how good a book like this is by how it impacts readers. Here's a short list of what it's done to me:

1. I've suddenly started paying attention to how much garbage goes into my trash can in my garage every week.
2. I've quit using plastic baggies for my lunches, trading them out for reusable containers instead.
3. I've begun composting any organic material I can in my yard.
4. I go to the store less and try to buy less stuff I don't really need.
5. I've selected this as a primary text for two of my classes next semester.

Little things, yes, but any book that can convince me to quit using plastic baggies must be a solid read.

Andrew Mutch says

You wouldn't think a book about trash and garbage would make for an interesting read. But "Garbology" takes the topic of trash and turns it into a thought-provoking read. The author breaks it down into 12 easy to read chapters each exploring a different aspect of waste and garbage in our culture. You'll learn how the transformation of the United States into a nation of consumers has turned us into a wasteful nation that generates mountains of trash. The author follows a winding path back and forth through the history of our country to explain the history of trash collection from turn-of-the-20th-Century New York City to our modern day landfill system. You'll learn how individual decisions drive everything from the amount of trash

generated to the cost of groceries in your local supermarket. It's hard to finish this book and not be disheartened about the amount of waste that we generate on a daily basis. I guarantee that you'll likely find a number of ways that you can reduce your personal contribution to the ever-growing piles of garbage in our country.

Yaaresse says

Note: while this book does discuss other countries, it is mostly focused on the United States and so the comments below reflect that. After all, we Americans are the ones wasting the most and denying it the hardest.

Each and every one of us will generate an average of 102 tons of trash in our lifetime, a bit over 7 pounds per day. (Actually, those are numbers from almost a decade ago, so it's probably a lot worse now.)

Most of us have the luxury of municipal waste service, so we trot our overfilled trash bins to the curb once a week, and we pretty much assume that the trash fairies come and make it all disappear. Maybe they magically turn it into kitten cuddles and unicorn tears as fertilizer for rainbows or something. We don't know. We don't want to know. It would disturb our peace of mind and feeling of being entitled to consume more and more if we understood the sheer volume of garbage generated every single day and what really happens with it.

The book is divided loosely into three parts:

1. The broad scope of the problem and the particular problem of the "plastic chowder" that our oceans have become.
2. A zoom in to look at the specifics of "garbage archeology." You think data mining collects a lot of personal information about your life? Turn your trashcan over to some anthropologists. It puts a whole new spin on "digging up dirt" about someone.
3. Examples of how some communities and individuals have attempted to tackle the problem. What worked? What didn't? Why or why not?

Along the way are lots of fascinating (and horrifying) graphs, stats, and anecdotes.

By the way, don't be smug and think that your tiny little bit of recycling makes you virtuous. Most of us recycle very little and do it badly. Even if we are scrupulous at home, someone else throwing the wrong things in a load can make it so "dirty" that it cannot be processed and ends up in the landfill anyway. Then the waste management companies try to ship it all to other countries for processing, the carbon footprint of all that shipping wiping out any positive effect of the recycling effort. Oh, and China, who was the major processor for recycling, doesn't want our trash anymore. It's too dirty and no longer profitable for them. That's not to say you shouldn't still make the attempt to recycle, but let's stop pretending that because you remembered to throw that soda can into the right bin you are "doing your part." As author Humes points out, most of us use our meager efforts of recycling as a kind of absolution for buying more stuff. More shrink-wrapped, over-packaged, disposable stuff that we cart home in single-use plastic bags. If there is one take-away from this book, it is that nearly everyone is thinking about the problem of waste from the wrong end. Instead of looking at disposal first, we need to tackle our out-of-control acquisition mindset. Simply, we don't have to dispose of what we don't acquire in the first place.

One effect of reading this book is that I became hyper-aware of what ends up in our garbage. It's not that I was UNaware before. I had noticed that we have the smallest trash bin on the block and that still our bin is

seldom more than half-full each week while neighbors' bins are overflowing. I was well-aware that things like batteries, light bulbs, aerosol cans, etc. could not be put in either regular trash or recycling. We diligently rinse cans, cut apart the six-pack rings, tie knots in used plastic wrap/produce bags, and separate the tops from the plastic juice and milk bottles when we have them. If we get food to go, we politely hand back the straws (don't use them), plastic utensils (don't need them) and excess condiment packets (don't want them). Hey, it's not only future trash, but it runs up the restaurant's food cost to waste that stuff. So we're good, right? Uhhh....no. Every morning I put together a lunch for the spouse. And suddenly I was very aware of exactly how much plastic wrap, baggies, and plastic containers we use every day for this. I'm aware of the number of cleaning products under the sink and the amount of food scraps that could go into a compost pile. I notice those damned little plastic PLU stickers on every single piece of produce. (Apparently, those little buggers are a big problem.) Suddenly, the little bags we put snacks in as a portion control measure seem more nefarious than a great idea. And speaking of produce, when and why did it become necessary for groceries to shrink wrap individual potatoes? That's just idiotic.

The point is, we could all do small things to chip away at our own personal 102 ton trash heap. Perhaps one of the most important things we can each do is purely mental: we can contemplate the idea that "waste" and "garbage" are not necessarily the same thing. As the artists-in-residence at the San Francisco waste facility (yes, it's in the book) discover, we waste a lot of useful stuff. Everything we waste is not garbage. Garbage is the stuff that cannot be salvaged for any other use.

Perhaps we should make "waste" a verb again. Don't waste food. Don't waste paper. Don't waste your money on something that you don't really want and will just throw away. Then you'll have less wastefulness, and your trash will only be full of garbage.

I like Humes' idea of choosing five actionable items and making them new habits. First two for us: start a compost pile for veggie scraps and start collecting small jars to replace those portion control baggies!

Charlene says

This book got off to a slow start, providing a somewhat interesting but well - told history of trash, but soon became much more interesting and unique, teaching me many things I of which I was fairly unaware.

Starting at the dawn of civilization, Humes detailed the various steps humans took to get rid of their waste. They threw it into streets, out windows, and generally everywhere they lived. Basically early humans, who gave up their nomadic ways to live in villages, cities, and empires lived in very close proximity to all their trash. It took, and indeed still takes, a lot of money, planning, and organized effort to get rid of the significant amount of waste humans produce. All living things make waste but humans make a disproportionately large amount of it and it has to go somewhere.

Early attempts to get rid of waste included trying to force citizens to haul their trash a mile outside of the city limits (that failed miserably), burying it and building whole cities atop it, and finally making official places to dump it (creating a whole new world of problems as those places quickly fill up around the globe).

The history was nice enough, but what makes this book worth reading is the section on plastics. I have learned a fair amount about plastics, and if you asked me if I felt the need to read a book about them to learn more, I probably would have said no. But, I would have been wrong. This book provided an excellent history of the activists who brought the problems with plastic waste to light (so, so much more interesting than I would have imagined- great stuff!) as well as detailing the fascinating results from studies on plastic waste.

This book is free on hoopla. If you do not want to read the entire book, I would at least suggest listening to the section about plastics.

The author is passionate about the senseless waste produced by human greed. For me, this went over the top. I am not sure why. I loved the Story of Stuff. She was extremely passionate and, I dare say, pissed off. That worked for me. I enjoyed her educated rants. This just didn't have that feel.

Also included are some mildly interesting findings from garbologists who sift through the world's trash to learn about our behaviors (e.g. humans overestimate how much healthy food they will eat in a week. They don't seem to waste as much junk food, presumably eating it all, but waste much more healthy food, presumably saying to themselves while shopping for the week, "I will eat this healthy stuff," only to throw it in the garbage when it remains uneaten and begins to rot).

Humes also detailed his conversations with various people working with garbage. This aspect of the book really added to the overall book in a really positive way. It was a great addition to the rest of the information provided throughout the book.

Clif says

Documentary, educational and full of human interest stories, Garbology makes going through the trash very worthwhile. Edward Humes' writing style is so flowing and easy to follow that I am going to check out his other books - Monkey Girl? What could that be about?

Americans have a problem with waste and it's perfectly understandable. Why shouldn't things be thrown away without thought when the price paid directly in dollars by the average citizen is insignificant, the stuff disappears like magic and the economy thrives on the consumption that is encouraged by having to buy over and over again?

It's the same psychology present with global warming - there's no real contact with the consequences, no immediate penalty for going on with what we've all become accustomed to in the last 50 years. We all live the lifestyle of the rich and famous compared to the rest of the world and all looks well from within the cocoon.

But it's another story out there on the ocean where a soup of floating plastic is being eaten by the bottom of the food chain, or on the highway and increasingly the railroad, where tremendous loads of trash are being hauled not just dozens but hundreds of miles to be laid to rest in landfills. The book relates how some items that were tracked made multiple journeys across the country before coming to rest.

The basic problem is one of something used for minutes or even seconds then becoming a burden for ages. It makes absolutely no sense. I've often thought that if the world comes to an end it won't be with a boom but with one final convenience thoughtlessly indulged - not the straw that broke the camel's back, but the plastic coaster that sank the toxic garbage barge!

Garbology moves through every aspect of garbage handling, from the operation of the huge Puente Hills landfill near LA through the attempts to capitalize on trash with companies like ChicoBag, to individuals setting a good example of waste avoidance like Bea Johnson, to those out trawling the remote Pacific for

society's plastic debris, modern man's uncontrolled experiment on the environment.

Each chapter comes with a personal story and colorful characters with determination to do their best against the mountain of waste. It is all put together so seamlessly that it is hard to pause at the end of a chapter because it flows so naturally into the next.

By all means have your laptop or PDA nearby as you read since you will find excellent videos online that show you exactly what Edward Humes is describing. I was particularly eager to see the huge BOMAC garbage handling machines and the Puente Hills landfill - so I was elated to find National Geographic has a 45 minute video covering the machine and the landfill, even featuring the same BOMAC driver that Humes interviews in the book.

You'll race through this book, but many things will stick with you. Here's one that I found remarkable: many public works departments have special hazardous waste collection days that occur only once or a few times a year. If you miss one you must wait quite a while for the next one. Studies have been made of the content of the garbage stream and it turns out that on the day AFTER the special collection event, the amount of hazardous waste in the garbage spikes - because those who have saved up their nasty stuff and then missed the collection say to themselves "oh hell, I'm just going to dump it!"

It's all in our heads - that is - the solution to the problem is in our own recognition of what we are doing. Garbology is a wake-up book.

Cindy Brown Ash says

I encountered this book by chance when part of the NPR interview of Edward Humes, author of *Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash* caught my attention.

In the interview, Humes was talking about Bakelite, an early plastic that was used for billiard balls, piano keys, and telephones -- things that were meant to be durable, and have long, even heirloom-length, lives. He was calm and reasoned, not casting blame but describing a shift in the way materials are used as being problematic. It was impersonal, informative, and assumed intelligence from the audience.

Humes opens the book with an anecdote of elderly hoarders, Jesse & Thelma Gaston, who had been trapped in their own home, by their own trash, for three weeks. He moves further into the story of trash by describing other hoarders, the condition of hoarding, and the media attention it has received in the last few years. His punchline is startling:

"But little if any thought is given to the refuse itself, or to the rather scarier question of how any person, hoarder or not, can possibly generate so much trash so quickly.

Of course, there's a reason for this blind spot: namely, the amount of junk, trash, and waste that hoarders generate is perfectly, horrifyingly normal. It's just that most of us hoard it in landfills instead of living rooms, so we never see the truly epic quantities of stuff that we all discard. But make no mistake: The two or three years it took the Gastons to fill their house with five to six tons of trash is typical for an American couple."
(page 3/location 106)

He follows this assertion with a discussion of how much trash the average American generates daily, coming up with an average lifetime production of 102 tons of trash. There is a reasonably detailed discussion of how

one estimates that amount, and multiple illustrations for how much 102 tons really is. Aircraft carriers are involved. Which is kind of scary, when you are talking about one person's trash.

Humes then poses three questions: What is the nature and cost of that 102-ton monument of waste? How is it possible for people to create so much waste without intending to do so, or even realize they are doing it? Is there a way back from the 102-ton legacy, and what would that do for us... or to us? (pages 11-12) These three questions form the organizing principles of the book.

Part 1: The Biggest Thing We Make describes how America deals with trash, how it has been dealt with in the past, and some "paths not taken" in the history of American waste management. He talks about the concept of waste and wastefulness, how our natural sense of thrift was overcome by early mid-century advertisers (fans of *Mad Men* might find this familiar territory), and how the political climate defeats promising policies. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is discussed in (rather depressing) detail. Humes corrected my misconception, a common one, he asserts, that the Garbage Patch (not to mention the other gyres collecting plastic trash in the other oceans) is not an "island" of trash, but a chowder of plastic bits with floating detergent bottles and milk cartons and old toys floating around what ought to be a pristine blue surface thousands of miles from anywhere.

Part 2: The Trash Detectives was perhaps the most depressing section of the book. It's the shortest, because it's the area involving the greatest number of unknowns. It goes against what we might assume, that "someone out there" knows what happens to the cans we put in the recycling, or the printer cartridges that we drop off at Office Depot, but in fact there is not really a clear, readily followable chain for where stuff goes when we're done with it (except the landfill) as there is for how to get it into our hands. Humes does a great job of detailing exactly what is and is not known about trash after its useful life, and although the information itself is depressing, his prose never is. It's informative and occasionally incredulous, but always readable and factual; he is one of us, which is to say, he doesn't exempt himself from the problem.

Part 3: The Way Back was... maybe not so much empowering, given how thoroughly Humes detailed the scope of the problems our trash poses, but certainly hopeful. "Pick of the Litter" details a San Francisco dump and artist-in-residence program that talks about how much is found in the dump, but also how much potential there is for the stuff in there as actual materials. "Chico and the Man" recounts the efforts of a small entrepreneur to create a new kind of reusable shopping bag, and to educate people on the environmental benefits of avoiding plastic shopping bags -- and the gigantic lawsuit that was mounted against him by the plastic bag industry -- and how it was defeated. The remainder of the section talks about the efforts communities around the world and one Marin County, California family of four has been working to reduce their waste, one innovative idea at a time.

If you're interested in treading lightly on the Earth, this book will be interesting and informative. If you've never thought about it before, it's a reasonable place to start; Humes makes a very good case for remaking ourselves into a less wasteful culture as being good for us personally, as well: with less stuff, and better stuff, we can do more, save more, be financially more secure and nationally more secure. The materials we have in our landfills are resources we've paid for and then discarded as though they are valueless. Humes makes a powerfully readable case for the value of our resources, and for renewing our natural tendency to thrift.

Vy says

In describing Puente Hills, America's largest active landfill, Humes says it's "impressive. It's also

compelling, revelatory and horrifying all at the same time." Well, that pretty much sums up this book too!

Hume explores what and how much we throw away (102 tons in the lifetime of an average American!) and then what happens to it. Our waste mismanagement system is explained against a historical and political context. This is not just about recycling, composting, and converting garbage to fuel. The book presents a well-crafted argument for the importance of reducing consumption (gulp!) and moving away from a disposable economy.

I recycle, use reusable bags, always call to opt out of catalogs--heck, even drive an electric car--so I thought I was doing okay, but now that I look for it, I see numerous ways that I am needlessly contributing to my own trash legacy. *And* I'm inspired to take some corrective measures, which is the real litmus test for a book like this. If you make trash (and I bet you do!), I highly recommend this book.

Beth Kakuma-Depew says

I found some chapters more fascinating than others. The story about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch would make an excellent children's picture book. The section on landfills was also interesting. I do love my two Chicobags, and was surprised they had been targeted in legal battles by Big Plastic. I didn't even know there was a Big Plastic Industry in America. The information about the Waste-to-Energy plants was great!

But I read the last chapter on the Johnson family's life without any plastic with skepticism. I would love to emulate them, but I find it very hard to do right now. After living in Sacramento for 6 years and then moving back to the Midwest, I can say that some parts of this country are more friendly to this lifestyle than others. A good food co-op is essential, or maybe a Whole Food store nearby. And farmer's markets are seasonal around here, unlike the year-long bounty I remember from CA. I guess I could order bulk products to be shipped to me, but I don't have the storage space for them in my small house! I did find her example of living with less to be inspiring, especially her motto: refuse rather than recycle when ever possible.

Emily says

Don't read this book. Here's all you need to know:

We make a lot of trash. Plastic is the main cause of it. Most people don't know that we make this much trash because we hide the problem. Help clean up trash. Recycling isn't very efficient, but it's still better to recycle than to throw away recyclables. There is a family who can live with one mason jar of trash per year, but she's mostly just outsourcing her trash so she doesn't really even count. Bring reusable bags everywhere you shop. There's a lot of trash in the ocean. It's mad hard to get out. The ashes in *The Great Gatsby* come from trash burning.

That's pretty much it. Don't read it. It's almost interesting, but it's so rambling and bad.

Jane says

"Garbology" is an eye-opening read. It's also sobering, and I defy any one to read this book without afterwards finding oneself thinking of ways in which to alter one's lifestyle--whether subtly or dramatically--in an effort to reduce one's own waste impact. Humes presents us with unmistakable truths about everyday

items, such as the (still) ubiquitous plastic grocery bags. I found the statistics he puts forward about the amount of plastic particles floating (and sinking) in our earth's oceans to be among the most disturbing in the book. Although it's hard to think about how ALL of us can make it to the extreme "lack of wastefulness" lifestyle that Bea Johnson's family has achieved (a description of her life and family's "waste" transformation appears in one of the book's last chapters), Humes does share simpler ways that every individual can do a little something to reduce their wastefulness. Even before reading this book, I had found myself asking my husband, "What did our families do with all of this when we were little?" The answer is that we didn't have as much packaging in the U.S. in 1970 as we do today, and there wasn't as much of an emphasis on disposability of EVERYTHING as emerged over the next few decades. As consumers, it is easier to simply succumb to the "conveniences" presented to us without questioning their impact (or how to find/locate/achieve alternatives), but Humes makes it clear that if we care about the future, we really should begin resisting--at least in some areas--before we are all, indeed, buried in our self-made packaging in the name of profit and/or savings. I urge you each to read this, and to share your thoughts.

Chris Demer says

This book is fascinating, and somewhat shocking. The volumes of refuse produced by our consumer society is extraordinary. The average American produces 7 pounds of trash per day - or 102 tons in a lifetime! In addition to a history of the "garbage problem" and ways it has been addressed(or not) throughout history, the author describes in some detail where our "garbage" goes now. While we can feel complacent in our belief that a vast amount of our trash is now recycled, the actual amount is not great. In addition, some recyclables must travel great distances to be safely recycled. (There are 13 certified locations for recycling cathode ray tubes from old TVs -they are all in China!!!) In addition, we have been building garbage mountains all over the country (sanitary landfills.) While some of this material does decompose and produce usable gas, much of it takes far longer to decompose than was previously thought. In the meantime, plastic bags "fly" away and end up in streams, rivers and eventually the ocean where they, and multiple other objects are "collected" in gyres formed by currents and winds, causing untold deaths of sea birds and sea creatures. The United States does not look good in comparison with many other developed countries, which: have higher savings and lower credit card debt as a percent of income, and in addition to buying less, have devised better methods of managing waste, including higher percentages of recycling and clean burning for energy production.

While most Americans have an "out of sight, out of mind" attitude and continue to blindly shop for entertainment and discard usable items, there is a growing awareness and need to simply slow down our trash production. This involves a decrease in consumerism and wiser buying habits.

I thought I was a wise consumer and a low producer of trash (and by many standards that may be true), but I have become more aware of the problem and plan to be ever more conscious of what I throw out!

I highly recommend this very readable and important book!
