



The Waste Makers

Vance Packard

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

The Waste Makers

Vance Packard

The Waste Makers Vance Packard

An exposé of "the systematic attempt of business to make us wasteful, debt-ridden, permanently discontented individuals," *The Waste Makers* is Vance Packard's pioneering 1960 work on how the rapid growth of disposable consumer goods was degrading the environmental, financial, and spiritual character of American society.

The Waste Makers was the first book to probe the increasing commercialization of American life—the development of consumption for consumption's sake. Packard outlines the ways manufacturers and advertisers persuade consumers to buy things they don't need and didn't know they wanted, including the two-of-a-kind of everything syndrome—"two refrigerators in every home"—and appeals to purchase something because it is more expensive, or because it is painted in a new color. The book also brought attention to the concept of planned obsolescence, in which a "death date" is built into products so that they wear out quickly and need to be replaced. By manipulating the public into mindless consumerism, Packard believed that business was making us "more wasteful, imprudent, and carefree in our consuming habits," which was using up our natural resources at an alarming rate.

A prescient book that predicted the rise of American consumer culture, this all new edition of *The Waste Makers* features an introduction by best-selling author Bill McKibben.

Vance Packard (1914-1996) was an American journalist, social critic, and best-selling author. Among his other books were *The Hidden Persuaders*, about how advertisers use psychological methods to get people to buy the products they sell; *The Status Seekers*, which describes American social stratification and behavior; and *The Naked Society*, about the threats to privacy posed by new technologies.

The Waste Makers Details

Date : Published May 3rd 1978 by Pocket (first published 1960)

ISBN : 9780671822941

Author : Vance Packard

Format : Unknown Binding

Genre : Nonfiction, Economics, Design, Cultural, Sociology, Environment, Sustainability

 [Download The Waste Makers ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Waste Makers ...pdf](#)



From Reader Review The Waste Makers for online ebook

Nicole says

An education in the development of our wasteful society - born of industrialization and highly attributed, in this book, to the automotive and appliance industry in the late '50's. Packard drills the reader on the many "impending dooms" that will be caused by the American's developing penchant for excess. The author knew, long before many, that this constant need for bigger better faster and more would cause environmental and social issues beyond what could be imagined by the general populous. A great read and comical at times as Packard theorizes on the development of ludicrous time and space saving inventions "just on the horizon" - i.e. the family helicopter. It's interesting to read this book now, 40 years after publication, with the knowledge of what will and will not happen and develop. I'd recommend this book to devoted followers of the environmental movement who seek to understand how the wasteful American mentality was born. There were harbingers of doom in the late 50's and this book details their concerns. This book will also intrigue those who feel owned by their possessions and have a desire to understand how Americans were conditioned to believe that their worth is reflected by their ability to buy anything and everything.

Gilda Mansour says

Wow. All of the things I thought about marketing and production of goods is true! I always believed that things were designed to break so that consumers would be forced to consume more and I was right! This book is really interesting and a bit maddening!

Judy says

This is the third volume in Vance Packard's series of books about American life and sociology. In it he makes the case for calling America a society of waste makers by documenting the wanton discarding of automobiles, appliances, and gadgets due to the desire for the newest and the latest. That desire was created by advertizing.

During the 1950s, manufacturers began building obsolescence into their products both by lowering quality so that stuff wore out faster and by focusing on yearly style changes. American shoppers were made to want the newest, the latest, and even homes bought from previous owners were called "used homes."

Behind this was a carefully planned emphasis on consumerism perpetuated by the belief that to maintain a healthy economy more and more goods must be manufactured and bought whether people needed them or not. Even having more babies and encouraging population growth was a good thing because it created more customers!

He captures the materialistic mood of the 1950s and goes on to expose the inevitable consequences: depletion of natural resources, pollution, the decline of cities as suburbia grew, the failure to predict the costs of educating all those extra kids, as well as the moral and spiritual effects on a population whose main goal was to acquire things.

As in his other two books, Packard pretty much predicted the mess we are in today. In fact, reading this one

was an eerie experience because most of what he warned about in 1960 is right here all around me in my life and the lives of my children and grandchildren.

Packard was brutally attacked by big business in his day for exposing their strategies. He was also mocked for writing "popular" sociology. But I know my dad read his books and now I know why we had a Rambler as the family car. I bet Ralph Nader read him and Betty Friedan was inspired to write *The Feminine Mystique* by reading *The Waste Makers*.

In fact, many of his suggestions for resolving the issues created by such rampant consumerism are now also part of life as people who can see beyond their cars and restaurant level kitchen appliances and computers and phones, attempt to bring our world into balance.

I recommend these books, *The Hidden Persuaders*, *The Status Seekers*, and *The Waste Makers*, to anyone who cares about life for our descendents, because he explains clearly and fairly concisely how we got to where we are. Happily in each book he is a better writer. This one was not boring at any time.

Julie says

Still applicable almost 60 years later. What have we become?

This truly encourages one to ponder why we live the way we do, how decades of advertising have changed the very character of Americans.

I want Vance to write this book again, from the perspective of modern times. Then again, I don't.

amy says

Origin of the term "planned obsolescence"; one of many installments in American frugality discourse.

Aileen Bernadette Urquhart says

Good, but for an English woman in the 21st Century it was dated and American. Also, some remarks were sexist, although they would have been acceptable in 1960, I suppose.

I also found the style a bit odd. It was meant to be scientific, I think, but Packard just quotes comments from random people he met, as well as 'experts'. I also have difficulty dealing with data when expressed in x amount of dollars. I would have preferred percentages where possible.

Olivia says

Written at a time when many of the early treatments of 'iatrogenis' (self-causing-inducing) works were emerging. Works which did at the time make some impact as sociological insights without fully understanding the overwhelming impact contained in the message.

Today we have a more developed and self-conscious 'eco and self-policing' consumerism.

In the 50's and 60's politicians were hoist aloft the greater and the more innovative the stretch of the

industrial investment and consumer currency.

The good times were accepted as exactly that without thought of how or why. Behind the scenes governments could conduct tests and stockpiling related to potential conflict without being to public or answerable to citizens. In the meantime the citizens being in full employment with a continual stream of innovative and labour-saving or status ridden products, did not question any possible harm which might be involved.

The times have caught up with the first alarms of the 60's. Not before time. Many of these succinct, first small treatise would be worth re-visiting. They capture, firsthand with good factual detail many of the later, more messy messages of eco and financial slavery bedevilling us today.

Mark McTague says

Packard explains clearly why the disposable society ends with disposable lives. One of the most radical, revolutionary things you can do? - Get rid of your television (and today get your head out of your cell phone) and stop shopping. Just stop buying anything but food. We're citizens, not consumers. The consumer society ends up consuming you.

Sarah Sammis says

It's an interesting look at the 1950's (and early 1960's) consumer culture. As with most theses the book starts with a nostalgic assumption that things were better twenty or so years in the past but I bet that in the 1920s or 1930s, there's probably an equivalent book lamenting the excesses of that era and lauding the frugality of the turn of the century. That being said, the book does have some fascinating and chilling examples of how marketing works to build an artificial demand for a product. I worked four years for a marketing department of a high tech software firm and I can say that the tactics haven't changed.

Some of the book's points are disturbingly modern. The chapters on car models is worth a read. In the 1950s the focus was on making the cars lower to ground, wider and longer. Wider and longer has certainly come back into fashion with those hideous SUVs but of course now these cars seem to be getting taller which makes roll overs a serious problem. The book mentions that the car manufacturers at the time listed their cars low centers of gravity as an "anti roll over" feature. Funny how those same companies have forgotten this bit of common sense in order to sell tall cars.

Some of the book's points, though, don't hold up to the passage of time. The book expected the U.S. to be far more over populated by now than it is (assuming a continuous baby boom at rates comparable to post WWII), a worse depression than what is currently happening (due to an assumed continued one income family across the board), a worse state of pollution (no EPA at all, even one currently weakened by Bush is still better than none), and a far more depleted natural resources (assuming no recycling).

Another bit of the book that struck me as odd is the discussion on product life. The example Packard uses is the television set. Clearly television manufacturers have moved away from changing styles but poor quality to better quality and basically utilitarian styling. Televisions today come in a variety of sizes and shapes but they all seem to work without needing a quarterly visit by a television repairman. The two televisions we own work just as well as when we bought them. One of them is nearly 15 years old. The second one is 7 years old. We had to get it because the older one didn't have the video input needed to play our DVD's signal

directly.

One final note, the chapter on making larger purchases on credit really grabbed my attention as a new home buyer. I think Packard would have been mortified at the current home prices across the country, but especially in the more expensive urban areas. Although lending practices of banks and other mortgage brokers is far more conservative now than it was pre Great Depression, some of the sketchy practices are starting to resurface which could easily cause a similar loss of homes in the near future as it did in the 1930s.

Jonathan-David Jackson says

We generate a ton of waste. As *The Waste Makers* explains, most of it is not even necessary waste to maintain our lifestyle. Most of the waste is generated due to companies' needs to generate more profit than the previous quarter, and the desire for the economy to constantly be growing. Most of that growth is generated in this way: Manufacturers create a product because they want more money. Advertisers create a demand for a product. Consumers throw out their perfectly good old product and buy the new one, thus creating waste.

Very little products are sold because of actual, natural demand. It's all artificially created by advertisers - convincing you to part with your hard-earned money for something you don't really want and certainly don't need. Probably the most striking example given in the book of this kind of attitude is by B. Earl Puckett, at a meeting of fashion experts: "Basic utility cannot be the foundation of a prosperous apparel industry ... We must accelerate obsolescence ... It is our job to make women unhappy with what they have ... We must make them so unhappy that their husbands can find no happiness or peace in their excessive savings."

This is basically what marketers do to us. We have a ball. We are happy with the ball, chewing on it contentedly. Suddenly, there is a new ball, and they're telling us it is better than the one we have, and we're no longer happy with our old one.

There's a large focus in this book on low-quality products needing constant repairs, and I feel like that's one thing which has definitely improved since the 1950s. I would expect something like a TV to last more than 5 years without needing a repair, while in the 50s it was apparently common for a TV to need repairing several times a year. I feel like nearly every product I buy is a quality, well-made product, unless I purposefully go for the cheapest item like something from Poundland or Dollar Tree, and then I know I'm making a trade of price for quality.

A good read for anybody interested in marketing and waste.

Chris Chaplin says

Why is a perfectly good smart phone so passé after only 2 years? Why do we feel compelled to buy the latest fashions, whether in clothing or in kitchen appliances? Why does everything break down the moment it's out of warranty?

Over a half century ago, Vance Packard explained why, introducing to the public the concept of "planned obsolescence" and other mechanisms that ensure the wheels of industry keep churning out products we are conned into demanding.

As our driverless capitalist train rushes headlong towards the abyss, it's comforting to know that the world's poorest won't suffer nearly as much from the inevitable catastrophe as we contented and complicit Goodreads users will.

Evan says

The Ur-text of my "materialism schism" shelf, Packard's cold-eyed, pitch-dark and pointed critique of American economic materialism of the 1950s may date in certain particulars but still resonates with a message and insights that continue to plague and disturb us.

Vance Packard was a prolific author of social criticism in the '50s, '60s and '70s. Not social criticism in the deep philosophical sense, perhaps, but more in the spirit of the muckrakers of the early 20th century. He wrote many bestselling books about the dark side of the American Dream. *The Waste Makers* from 1960 looks back primarily at the postwar '50s with an alarming eye on the destructive and deceptive effects of American materialism, planned obsolescence and the dispiriting wastefulness of advertising and consumerism. There are even hints of the kind of outrage that would mark the forthcoming environmental movement. Packard was ahead of the entire curve here.

I bought this book for 50 cents at a library sale and it's a cherished part of my collection. I found it ironic that it was a "discard."

(KevinR@Ky, amended in 2016)

Alan Hughes says

It is surprising how little that this book has dated in the two generations since it was released. The dangers of planned obsolescence remain as important as when he coined the term. We are now all too painfully aware of the risks of our excessive consumption on the finite resources of our planet and the consequences of the increased waste.

Many of the trends he predicted have proven to be correct and unfortunately the depressing effects on personality and culture seem to be taking place.

An exposé of "the systematic attempt of business to make us wasteful, debt-ridden, permanently discontented individuals," *The Waste Makers* is Vance Packard's pioneering 1960 work on how the rapid growth of disposable consumer goods was degrading the environmental, financial, and spiritual character of American society. *The Waste Makers* was the first book to probe the increasing commercialization of American life—the development of consumption for consumption's sake. Packard outlines the ways manufacturers and advertisers persuade consumers to buy things they don't need and didn't know they wanted, including the two-of-a-kind of everything syndrome—"two refrigerators in every home"—and appeals to purchase something because it is more expensive, or because it is painted in a new color. The book also brought

attention to the concept of planned obsolescence, in which a "death date" is built into products so that they wear out quickly and need to be replaced. By manipulating the public into mindless consumerism, Packard believed that business was making us "more wasteful, imprudent, and carefree in our consuming habits," which was using up our natural resources at an alarming rate. A prescient book that predicted the rise of American consumer culture, this all new edition of *The Waste Makers* features an introduction by best-selling author Bill McKibben. Vance Packard (1914-1996) was an American journalist, social critic, and best-selling author. Among his other books were *The Hidden Persuaders*, about how advertisers use psychological methods to get people to buy the products they sell; *The Status Seekers*, which describes American social stratification and behavior; and *The Naked Society*, about the threats to privacy posed by new technologies.

Alex Lee says

Very percipient book. You'd wonder why no one takes such an examination to heart. But what's left out, in a minor but important way -- is that to see the waste we produce we must also take a critical distance to our status seeking. Those of us who are enveloped by the commodity fetishism of new products are those of us least likely to see waste production everywhere, as the focus is on the increased vitalization of the self through commodity use and purchase.

Nonetheless, Packard's thoughts in the early 60s are just as prevalent then as it is now. Of course, our sense of impending doom is always based on current technology. Unbridled faith in tech is another way to defer responsibility, so that we don't have to change.

There are two additional thoughts I want to also leave. 1. Tragedy of the commons applies to limited resources, wherein everyone sees others using up resources, so resources are used faster as people try to get as much as they can before the shared resource is gone. 2. Our concept of "normal" as pushed by advertisers lends us a sense that how we live is how things are supposed to be. If we are brought up like thinking like this, we wouldn't know how else to act, or how to critically assess our lifestyle.

Packard does well in examining the thoughts and figures inherent in the coming of planned obsolescence. He ends the book by stating some other deficient areas which we should address, but I believe this is insufficient... really, he should address the ideological (metaphysical) assumptions that organize human behavior that give rise to how this situation arose. As long as we do not understand how we got in this mess, we can't undo the thinking that continues to create this situation. He is correct that using labor to justify wealth distribution is a major part of the problem. But what other alternatives do we have? I would give him 4.5 stars if possible, because he only points out the problem (clearly) but doesn't really dig into why this problem exists... for him to do that, he would probably have to write another kind of Marxist tome (although not necessarily Marxist, just of that caliber), which may be beyond the scope he has intended. As it is, this is a small but thick book that argues for the recognition of the problem but offers very little in the way of solutions.

Pointing out the problem is good, but without a clear analysis of the conditions of the problem, this is not enough.

Isabel says

Erschreckend wie aktuell das Buch nach über 50 Jahren noch ist! Ein Betrachtung aus heutiger Sicht wäre interessant...
