



# Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage

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## **Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage** Heather Rogers

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.

## **Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage Details**

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Author : Heather Rogers

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## From Reader Review Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage for online ebook

### Mia says

What happened to cooperative kitchens?  
When was fixing things deemed unpatriotic?  
Why can't we return our empties?  
How did the plastics industry appropriate the last word in a grassroots chant at the first Earth Day and thus convince all of us that the endless production of packaging is normal because it can be recycled (but it's not)?  
Why was salvaging in the dump banned?  
Who drove the mob out of the garbage business?  
How much of our purchase price is packaging?  
Why are most landfills only guaranteed to work for 50 years?  
How did Keep America Beautiful invent littering as a concept and perpetrate an act of greenwashing by reducing all stewardship to that?  
Why do we pee in our drinking water?  
Is our age's art chiefly product design and propaganda?  
AND SO FORTH.

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### Andrew Kollen says

Heather Rogers books does an excellent job of discussing an issue that is often overlooked. Through her use of statistics, looking at garbage in the past and arguing that companies are to blame for the waste American's create, Rogers intrigues the reader and helps them stop and think about the waste they use each day and the serious implications of it. Rogers passion for the world is evident through her desire for more legislature to regulate the materials companies can use. She wants Americans to realize they do consume a lot, but the waste created stems from companies. Gone Tomorrow is a book that challenges the reader to become more informed about waste and the serious implications that it has on our world today.

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### Noëlibrarian says

I read this when it first came out, in 2006, and despite other reviewers' complaints of its dullness, I found it fascinating and extremely readable. And it angered me. One particular chapter I remember most clearly - one that I tend to cite during dinner parties, before I stop myself - is called "The Golden Age of Waste", and deals with the post-war consumer boom in America. Everyone had a kitchen full of shiny new appliances, so advertisers began to convince people they needed a second fridge for the garage, a second washer and dryer for the "related living" setup in their new sprawling ranches. When this tactic failed to move enough units, the idea of built-in obsolescence began to take hold.

Or take the neat trick that pop bottlers have pulled on the American public since the early 1970s: To maximize profits, they did away with multi-use, refillable bottles, and shifted the burden of bottle disposal onto the consumer, then *admonished the consumer* to "Keep America Beautiful(KAB)." The story of how this was effected, and the cynicism of the KAB campaign is enough to make any recycling-minded person

weep.

Author Heather Rogers was born the year before this reviewer, and one suspects she, too, was a child of PBS's "Sesame Street" and "The Big Blue Marble," and was also encouraged to "Give a Hoot" by Woodsy the Owl. Her clear prose and meticulous research make this a book to be savored and revisited, and recommended to anyone with even a passing interest in understanding the history and problems of garbage in America.

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### **Bart says**

"The important thing to remember about landfills is that they're not just an unfortunate byproduct of capitalism; they actually represent the success of capitalism" (152). So Heather Rogers quotes John Marshall. Rogers quotes many waste historians, business insiders, government officials, and grassroots activists in this well researched and written book. She traces the modern conceptions of "garbage" and the disposal of "garbage" from 1800's America when few had many manufactured goods and gleaning was common to modern day consumption and disposal. Between these times ideas and realities (created in business interests) of sanitation, litter - yes, corporations created anti-litter campaigns to divert attention from garbage - disposable and non-durable products, packaging as a money making tool, and corporate greenwashing (among many other issues!) shaped today's prevailing attitudes toward trash. Rogers also includes inspiring resistance to corporate tactics throughout the book.

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### **Kayla Giordano says**

This book was highly educational and really enlightened me when it came to understanding how garbage and recycling really works throughout the U. S. This book would be great as required reading for students studying environmental science. However, as someone who picked this book up more for recreation, I did feel it was a little slow and repetitive in its points.

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### **Trisha Quigley-Regan says**

excellent. This book is very factually and at times get drag, but the facts about the history and impact of US garbage are horrific. This book will change the way you choose to purchase and consume. Americans consume way to much garbage, and useless products and packaging. I believe I can not change everything but that one person CAN do so much, and try their hardest not to be one of the billions of people carelessly polluting the earth. It isn't as though our consumption began from need, it began because of the advertising and sales industry, and the government joined right in. Advertising and government was the carrot and we were the horse. There have been so many tactical errors along the way. Our situation may not have gotten so bad if someone had told the American people not to be lead like horses so easily down the marketing/advertising path of individual packaging, and throw away products. Ok so I'm just rambling now, but people need to wake up and realize that just because a product is cute, compact, and tossable it isn't really what you want, and odds are you don't NEED it either. **THINK BEFORE YOU BUY!**

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## Camille McCarthy says

This was a very well-researched book on what happens to garbage and how it got to be this way, looking back at the history of waste collection in the United States. It's so upsetting to see how we went from having almost no waste (everything was seen as useful) to seeing everything around us as eventual trash. It was interesting to see the different methods of using discarded items, such as feeding slop to pigs, sorting and selling certain items, and composting, and seeing how these methods were over time stigmatized for some reason or another and burial of trash became so ubiquitous just because it was easy and cheap despite all the problems it caused.

I liked how the author took a different approach than others and even looked at Goodwill and how it came about as a way of making people feel better about discarding items, since it went to people in need. I also like how she pointed out that even though the items were donated, they still end up being sold, contributing to the increase in consumerism at the time and even today.

It was interesting to see why so many people I've known in the waste management industry hate Waste Management Inc. so much - they are a huge company which profits from waste and so doesn't really discourage it and actually tries to make landfills appear "green."

I thought she was a bit too harsh on green capitalism, in particular on the Cradle to Cradle idea. I think if she had read "the Upcycle" she would agree much more with the ideas presented by Braungart and McDonough. I see her issues with continuing this rate of consumerism constantly and not attempting to slow it down and reuse items but I think that Braungart and McDonough would agree that reusing items is best, it's just that they are also focused on redesigning things like house paint which are not exactly things that can simply be reused. It just seems that she is a bit overcritical of their ideas - she chastises them for bragging about the new plant they designed for Ford, since Ford still produces such low-efficiency cars, but at the same time, since they worked on that plant it has become an example for other businesses and if they had refused just because it was a car company they might never have been able to implement their ideas and show that they work. The authors of Cradle to Cradle are striving for an always-better model of business but they stress that you have to start somewhere, so for them any change in the right direction is a good starting point. Rogers seems to see this as "greenwashing" no matter what and I see her point because a lot of businesses are "greenwashing" the customers, but that is why the Cradle-to-Cradle certification has a lot of different levels - a greenwashing business would probably stay in the bronze category indefinitely while a business that is serious about changing would progress up the levels over time.

Overall this was a very informative book that takes a hard look at our waste practices and how we got here. I enjoyed the fact that she went into the history of waste disposal since that gives some ideas of what to do with our waste, and what worked in the past versus what didn't.

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## Loreley says

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## Kevin Quirolo says

This well documented book addresses the absurdly tragic reality of our waste disposal system. The first half is dedicated to the history of garbage in the United States, which would only be interesting to someone interested histories of the mundane. The second half discusses more recent history leading into current practices, which are gripping in their grotesque destructiveness. The chapter on recycling is especially disturbing in its reversal of received wisdom.

It is published by the progressive New Press. So it is not surprising that there are passing references to Karl Marx. What is surprising is that Heather Rogers completely avoids imposing an overbearing, robotic 'dialectical' or class conflict analysis on her vast accumulation of information, which is not to say she leaves the facts to 'speak for themselves.'

Informative and perspective changing. I would give it five stars except for the sometimes excess of detail.

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## Paige says

This book was pretty informative on a topic I didn't know much about.

For me, the beginning few chapters were interesting but not particularly revelatory. However later on in the book--the chapters "Spaceship Earth," "Recycling," and "The Corporatization of Garbage"--were really engrossing for me. I have notes from almost every page. Basically there is a conspiracy (like, these people actually do openly contrive and scheme and lobby and finagle) to generate trash and it's pretty appalling.

Heather Rogers isn't a bad writer--I didn't feel this book was dry or boring by any means--but I did feel it could have been put together more solidly. For example, she uses somewhat sensational language, which I believe is justified, but she doesn't rigorously document the particulars of WHY she uses it, making it seem somewhat alarmist at first. When she does document really awful things--thousands of smog deaths, for example--it seems like they're almost afterthoughts. If it were my book, I would have led with the horrific & well-documented ill-effects of garbage, as a sort of introductory "hey this is why you should care about this issue," rather than just putting them in seemingly at random. Similarly, there was a Karl Marx reference or two that seemed out of place. Unfortunately I don't really know much about Marx(ism), so maybe it really was relevant, but it didn't seem that way to me.

This book covers a lot of ground, but as the author admits, it's about municipal garbage, which in the US accounts for only 1 out of every 70 tons of waste produced, as opposed to industrial waste. So it's really just the tip of the iceberg. I think it's still really important to read it though. She doesn't try to make the reader feel bad about their household trash as you might suspect, either--the whole "the individual is solely responsible for their trash" is exposed as a cunningly crafted campaign carried out by the packaging industry.

Overall a super decent book, I take away one star because it could have been smoother & laid out a better argument in the beginning, and also because I found my attention wandering at times (although I can't really blame the book for that--I've had a lot on my plate lately).

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## Gillian says

*Gone Tomorrow* was a very eye opening book about the reality of waste in America. It really focuses on how capitalism has had a major influence on the amount of garbage that is produced each year. It also focuses on the amount of garbage produced by every person each day and where it all goes.

I liked how this book sort of gives you a behind the scenes look at what is really happening. It lets the reader know that this is a huge environmental issue that is worsening each day due to the selfishness of big corporations and the carelessness of people.

I did not like that this book was almost depressing to read. Heather Rogers is constantly throwing all of these facts at the reader about what is really going on and there aren't many steps being taken to stop it. Even recycling isn't all that it's made out to be, most of what is recycled gets either buried or burned.

Overall this book was great, it was very informative, never letting the reader down with facts and it gets right to the point.

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### **Torie says**

The first part of this book was hard to get through. In fact, the folks who loaned it to me both put it down after the first few chapters. They warned me that it was depressing, and holy cow they were right. I started it at the same time that I was reading "*Where We Stand: Class Matters*," and the two ended up complementing each other in an interesting way. bell hooks' discussion of class as it relates to wealth, poverty, materialism and the sharing of resources speaks to the history of American consumption, waste and gluttony framed as patriotism. Rogers quotes marketing consultant Christine Frederick saying

"It is the ambition of almost every American to practice progressive obsolescence as a ladder by which to climb to greater human satisfactions through the purchase of more of the fascinating and thrilling range of goods and services being offered today."

That was in 1929!

Because the fate of all the stuff we use and throw away is so hidden, I think everyone needs to know exactly what the consequences of consumption are, and why there needs to be a massive shift in consciousness away from this completely non-sustainable way of life. That's the reward of actually finishing this book, which turned out to be a really compelling and crucial read.

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### **Talia says**

This is an ambitious book about an important and pressing issue: the overwhelming problem of how to deal with our municipal garbage (and, perhaps more importantly, the consumer issues that lead us to having so many discards in the first place). But I have to think that the people who gave the book 4 stars and up are doing so because they believe in the cause and not because the story-telling is so well executed.

I struggled with the description of the modern landfill in the first chapter in part because I work for a company with a solid waste management division. The technical descriptions were a bit heavy on "air quotes" that made processes seem unnecessarily evil or inaccessible--a stronger writer would not have backed away from these topics.

Likewise I was not comfortable with the overly dramatic descriptions of the solitary and miserable work life

of today's modern garbage worker ("...He sits intently, his body rigid as he opens the pincers wide and reels them down to clutch a snarl of bursting plastic garbage bags. Carefully but quickly the operator lures up then releases the tons of broken appliances, torn clothing and rotting food into one of the fuel channels that feed the fires. Just above the operator's right shoulder, two closed-circuit televisions beam faded, slightly distorted black-and-white images from cameras positioned in the mouths of the chutes. The grapple controller uses these to monitor the flow. On the small screens one can see the backdraft spitting up paper scraps and lightweight debris from the belly of the burner as the mounds of discards slowly, unceremoniously sink into the flames..."). Uhm, yeah, I know the author is also a documentary film maker--this probably works better on screen.

I was most intrigued by the early chapters of the book that described the terrible conditions in New York and other early US cities before trash hauling and disposal systems were formalized (1800s). I had never really thought about what a city like that would look like (or smell like). It was interesting to learn about the wild pigs running in the streets and the trade in certain re-usable discards, including some items that we would never think about selling/trading now = feces, hides of dead animals, bones, rags. Only after sanitation problems contributed to communicable diseases that were affecting the city's rich was a real organized effort focused on cleaning up the streets initiated, and even then the campaign had a weird moral/religious component. I liked reading about the scandals and failures associated with early municipal waste contracts.

Also good (p.72): "Sanitation engineers rarely challenged the fundamental market system that pathologically wasted resources. Their acquiescence helped the American public accept growing quantities of garbage without contemplating its implications. Changing practices in the home reinforced this position; people were consuming more and throwing out escalating amounts while growing increasingly accustomed to having it whisked away by professionals. At this formative time, flush toilets, indoor plumbing, more consistent street cleaning and improved refuse disposal were all making the act of wasting easier both logistically and aesthetically." I think it is important for us to acknowledge that waste happens in a hidden/private zone now, and we can do it secretly, and because we don't see its consequences we are a less likely to change our actions...

About packaging - very good (p 116): "As mom-and-pop stores with their advice-giving sales clerks gave way to self-service chain supermarkets, the package became the producer's 'sole representative at the sales decision point.' Packaging which had previously been a subset of manufacturing now became a subset of advertising, crucial to seizing the customer's attention and compelling buyer loyalty. And shoppers responded: good-looking packaging clearly enhanced the pleasure of consuming."

Further (p 117): "Individual shoppers paid for the increased expense of packaging, contained as it was within the price of the product, and were left to fund the management of wastes themselves. In that scenario, still true today, the expense of packaging was externalized off the ledgers of industry and onto the bankbooks of consumers and taxpayers..."

Things we should be shocked about:

- "About 80 percent of US products are used once then discarded"
- "50 percent of all paper ends up as garbage (in fact paper accounts for fully half of all discards in US landfills)"
- "Only 5 percent of all plastic is recycled, while almost two-thirds of all glass containers and half of aluminum beverage containers get trashed."
- Interesting to me: The fact that resin/plastic makers adopted that now-familiar triangle/numbering system to stamp plastics to supposedly make it easier for consumers to identify what type of plastics they are using and thus make it easier to recycle them. But really the numbers are confusing, the stamp has the effect of implying that maybe some good can come of this plastic, or maybe it was already recycled, when actually none of that is really true...

Finally, this was interesting: "Even though over 70 tons of industrial debris from mining, agriculture, manufacturing, and petrochemical production are created for every ton of household discards, it is the slough of daily life that affects average people most directly because it is the waste we make."

Really? You're really saying that this whole book was just about the one vs the 70 tons???

Hmmm, then, who's writing about the other 70? I think I want to find that book.

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### **Anastasia says**

My brother suggested I read this book after an email I sent to him bemoaning all the waste our home remodel was regenerating. It's not an engaging text by any means; I found it difficult to read and often had to force myself through a chapter at a time. The history of garbage disposal is an interesting topic - who knew our waste hauler, Waste Management Inc., was the largest hauler in the country? That much of what we so carefully sort and clean for recycling is, literally, trashed because the demand for said items is low and/or expense is high?

I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone without the caveat "it's really boring". Still, it's made me more mindful of what I purchase, what portion of those purchases will end up in the trash, and whether or not it's worthwhile to purchase it in the first place.

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### **Miranda says**

#### **Placeholder review**

Placeholder review. Predictably depressing but an essential read nonetheless, this book is more than a Marxist screed telling you the depressing crap you already knew. Some copyediting errors mar an important look into detritus as a mirror.

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