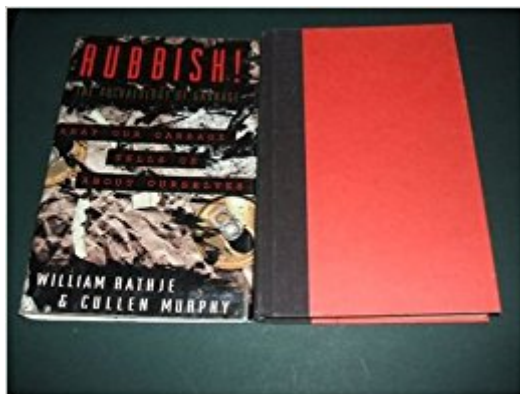


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Rubbish!: The Archaeology Of Garbage



Synopsis

An investigation into the geography, history, composition, mythology, demographics, and misperception of garbage discusses what human waste says about human beings' politics, economics, population, size, age, sex, and more. National ad/promo.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One of the central tenets of the University of Arizona's Garbage Project is that "what people have owned--and thrown away--can speak more eloquently, informatively, and truthfully about the lives they lead than they themselves ever may." Project garbologists have alchemized more than 250,000 pounds of refuse--from landfills and from trash cans in selected neighborhoods--into a treasure trove for experts in marketing and consumer research, census studies and environmentalism. Garbologists have determined that people waste three times more beef when the meat is in short supply than when it is plentiful; that many women use birth-control pills incorrectly; and that lower-income families consistently buy small-size, brand-name products rather than cheaper generic ones. Erudite and witty cultural tour guides, Rathje, an archeologist and anthropologist who directs the Project, and Atlantic managing editor Murphy claim that our garbage problems are solvable; that, with proper safeguards, incineration may be a viable option in some communities; and that paper--not disposable diapers or fast-food packaging--is a chief culprit in overloading landfills. Illustrated. First serial to Smithsonian; BOMC and QPB alternates; author tour. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

YA-- "Truth in garbage" might well be an appropriate subtitle for this in-depth examination of how garbage reflects the society that tosses it. Based on the findings of the Garbage Project at the University of Arizona, Rathje and Murphy's book seeks to dispel current myths while enlightening readers about American society from this unique perspective. They give a historical overview of what the human species has been doing with its refuse since hunter-gatherer times: dumping, burning, recycling, or reducing the amount of potentially discardable stuff. Subsequent sections explain how we unconsciously tell the truth about our lifestyles by what we throw away. Interesting information abounds. The last chapter urges readers to observe a "Ten Commandments" of consumption and disposal, which is based not on what "we think we know" but on what data from studies like this one reveal.- Carolyn E. Gecan, Thomas Jefferson Sci-Tech, Fairfax County, VA
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This book is great for exploding the myths about garbage that people carry around. It is especially good at proving wrong the idea that the United States is a particularly wasteful society. For instance, this book shows that disposable diapers are not a big problem in landfills -- they make up less than 2% of landfill garbage. The human waste in diapers should not even be of concern -- landfills accept sewer sludge and septic waste -- in other words: loose, uncontained liquid waste. Landfills are good for disposing of that stuff. Another example: Nothing you throw away in a trash can is going to biodegrade. Landfills are dry places on purpose, and biodegradation is a wet process. If you want something to biodegrade, start composting it. Last one: Recycling happens when recycling makes a profit. There are markets in everything, and recycling is by no means a new thing. Recycling is expensive and often produces toxic byproducts, so keep it all in mind. Also -- newspapers and construction debris are the big culprit in landfills. But there are no good-paying markets for recycling those items, so they sit. Mostly, this book is great at showing how often IDEALISM equals IGNORANCE. Good intentions don't yield good results.

If you are looking for a researched based discussion of trash this is the book for you. It is a bit older, so some of the information needs an update, but I thought it was an informed look at the study of garbage. If you are looking for more op-eds about people who have some relationship to trash which is more up to date, but not written by a scientist and is arguably more biased, read Garbology.

I don't do book reviews.

This is an overview of the University of Arizona's continuing trash sorting project started in 1972 to document the lifestyle habits of the American public through observing what we eat, what we use in household goods, etc., and then throw out. Socio, political and economic behaviors become evident while recording the fascinating finds in daily trash digging, probing, and quantifying. This project also included studies at the now closed Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island in New York City where holes were bored all the way to the bottom of the fill and where the studies then took on a more ominous dimension of environmental impact discoveries such as: that the breakdown of trash, even over years, is a myth. The research showed that there is little biodegradation occurring due to compaction and lack of bacterial decomposition, so the researchers found completely intact and recognizable items from food to readable newsprint- even at the bottom of the heap where it was at least 50 years old- same type discoveries of intact trash heaps discovered in ancient Rome, Greece, etc. Most distressing of the discoveries in the landfill was the discovery of the huge quantity of "leachate"- a toxic liquid stew, that is leaking at the rate of a million gallons a day into New York Harbor. The book concludes with recommendations on alternatives to landfill as a means to dispose of trash plus recycling and lifestyle changes. For another enlightening read on all things trash, there is Elizabeth Royte's "Garbage Land"- a personal story of discovery of what her family's trash footprint is and where everything including recyclables ends up- a real eye-opener and an entertaining read!

"Rubbish" is a highly academic book about "The Garbage Project" at the University of Arizona's Anthropology Department. The main idea behind "The Garbage Project" is to gain information about society by analyzing garbage patterns in various locations. Despite being a book about garbage, the contents of the book are quite diverse. The book is divided into 4 parts. The first section, An Introduction to the Garbage Project, gives the background of "The Garbage Project", why it started, what they do, and what they hope to accomplish. This section also discusses how anthropologists use garbage to learn about ancient civilizations. The second section, The Landfill Excavations, discuss the basic theories of landfills, how the team takes samples from landfills, and discusses why biodegradation does not work in landfills. The third section, Interlude: Diapers and Demographics, I found to be highly entertaining. This section has a fascinating chapter on estimating the population of a neighborhood (as well as sex and age) based on the garbage collected from this neighborhood (a study done to initially help the Census Bureau). This section is also filled with useless information such as "There is a link between owning a cat and reading "The National Enquirer"". There is also a

detailed discussion about disposable diapers in landfills. The final section, Garbage and the Future, was the most educational by far. This part discusses the serious shortcomings of citywide recycling programs and side effects people never hear about. There are also discussions on alternate garbage disposal methods, such as high tech incinerators used to generate electricity, as well as several other attempts at using technology to turn garbage into a useful product. The section and the book end with a chapter on reducing and addressing garbage disposal. I think this book will not be for everyone. The book reads like a Master's Thesis at times, rather long and seems to ramble. However, some parts of the book are exceptional (such as the chapter on recycling or "Closing the Loop") and are really an eye opener. I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in Environmental Sciences. Also, if you can manage to wade through pages of various scientific theories and facts, I'd highly recommend picking this book up! While a little slow reading at times, it is quite informative and I think a real eye opener.

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