Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash

Susan Strasser
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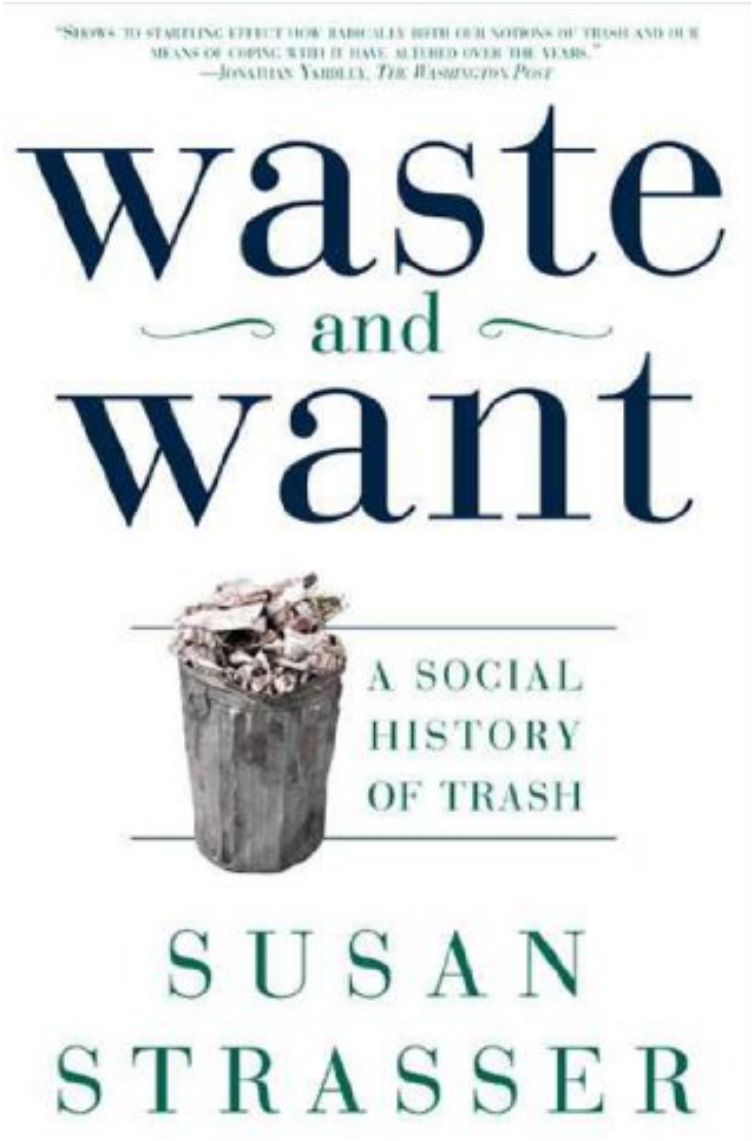

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Susan Strasser : Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Why We Waste and What We Can Do About ItBy Jacquelyn A. OttmanAnyone looking to understand WHY we waste in our current day and age need look no further than this exceptionally well researched and written social history of trash. Totally captivating to me who admittedly hates to waste, but I'm sure of interest to a broad swath of consumers who enjoy history and insights into our modern lifestyles.

I garnered many insights for WeHateToWaste.com, a global community that I manage, about what worked in the past and why to incentivize people to reduce waste or to collect it for economic purposes, and how these same strategies might be updated for the future.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Worth Reading - and Enlightening.By A Field GeologistAs a guy who works in the environmental field (I am a geologist) I found this book absolutely fascinating. It reveals things about life in the past that I could never have imagined. Recycling is NOT new...its old. We just abandoned the practice after WWII and became a throw-away society.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Waste not, but now wanting almost results in it just to make room . . . . .By appleton schneiderThe extent of research is impressive. And the presentation is expressive, not just factual.A great book that gives us a perspective of the past, and by juxtaposition, a penetratinglook at what the present means re. our values and our environment.

An unprecedented look at that most commonplace act of everyday life--throwing things out--and how it has transformed American society.Susan Strasser's pathbreaking histories of housework and the rise of the mass market have become classics in the literature of consumer culture. Here she turns to an essential but neglected part of that culture--the trash it produces--and finds in it an unexpected wealth of meaning. Before the twentieth century, streets and bodies stank, but trash was nearly nonexistent. With goods and money scarce, almost everything was reused. Strasser paints a vivid picture of an America where scavenger pigs roamed the streets, swill children collected kitchen garbage, and itinerant peddlers traded manufactured goods for rags and bones. Over the last hundred years, however, Americans have become hooked on convenience, disposability, fashion, and constant technological change--the rise of mass consumption has led to waste on a previously unimaginable scale.Lively and colorful, Waste and Want recaptures a hidden part of our social history, vividly illustrating that what counts as trash depends on who's counting, and that what we throw away defines us as much as what we keep.

From Publishers Weekly"Nothing is inherently trash," claims Strasser (Satisfaction Guaranteed) in this vibrant social history of American attitudes toward superfluous or unusable material items. Before the 20th centuryAwhen mass production, post-WWII consumer culture and planned obsolescence created a society in which disposability was the normAbroken crockery, food, buttons, bones, fat, rags, tin, paper and other refuse were precious commodities, especially in areas of urban or rural poverty. Drawing on the work of such anthropologists as Mary Douglas, Thorsten Veblen and Claude L?vi-Strauss, of social critics like Jacob Riis and of such authors as Lydia Maria Child (whose popular The American Frugal Housewife was published in 1829), Strasser demonstrates how the designation "trash" exposes underlying attitudes about class, race, ethnicity, patriotism, survival, religion and art. Perceptively noting the intersections between capitalism, consumerism, industrialization and class mobility, the book spills over with fascinating factsAfor instance, in 1830, 10,000 hogs roamed Manhattan's streets eating garbage and providing food for the poor. It also offers revealing analyses of why many Jewish immigrants went into the rag business; how "trash" is gendered and how sanitary napkins became emblematic of the new disposable consumer culture. The chapters on the ultra-patriotic scrap drives of WWI and IIAparticularly Strasser's observations on how the U.S. government encouraged spying on those who "hoarded" scrap metalAare illuminating and prove her point that "trash" is always more than it appears. Agent, Mary Evans. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalThe author of books on housework and the American mass market, social historian Strasser explores what America has discarded, from the period when Colonists valued everything up to today's era of public landfills. She chronicles how mass production, technological change, ideals of cleanliness, and style have altered America's attitudes toward stewardship and throwing things out. Since paper production in the early days required the addition of scarce rags and scraps, people used paper sparingly. But while Henry Ford's Model T was meant to last, competitor General Motors's yearly model changes heralded a consumer culture that venerated the new. Strasser's well-sourced text, replete with attributions from women's magazines, indicates that genre's evolution from frugal housekeeper's counselor to consumer culture adjunct. Beginning as a countercultural environmental movement in the late 1960s, recycling had begun to enter the mainstream by the 1980s. The book ends on the promising note that "profligacy may one day be understood as a stage of development." Highly recommended for academic and large public libraries.AElaine Machleder, Bronx, NY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Kirkus sBy their trash shall you know them" is the theme of this research-driven exploration of the rubbish and refuse habits of more than two centuries of Americans. ``Rubbish took on new meanings" in the vast transition between the preindustrial society of the 18th century and the consumer culture of the 20th, says Strasser (Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market, 1989). She not only sorts what was trash in the 19th century, but tracks how and why what is defined as garbage expanded from a few shards of broken crockery buried in the backyard to landfills full of computers and disposable diapers. Described in detail are thrifty habits of 19th-century families, who refashioned worn or used objects of every description from broken bottles (could be made into funnels and bowls) to tired party dresses. If objects like rags and bones couldn't be reused in the home, they were sold to itinerant peddlers to be recycled into paper and buttons. Children scavenged back alleys to find castoffs, especially scrap metal, that could be sold for a few

pennies. At the turn of the century, increasing class differences, the growth of manufacturing, new concern with sanitation, and the entrance of women into the marketplace with no time to refurbish worn clothing brought upheaval to trash culture. Further changes are tracked through WWI, the Depression, and WWII, when recycling fat, metal, rubber, and paper became a patriotic duty. A wave of consumerism followed WWII, and the current wave of recycling is an offshoot of the countercultural 1960s, says Strasser. Although concerned about the continuing large volume of refuse generated now, Strasser is heartened that sorting trash for disposal has been revived, this time as a moral act and not a pecuniary one. Rummaging through the trash barrel of history has unearthed some choice, if occasionally dry, morsels of 20th-century culture. (bw photos)