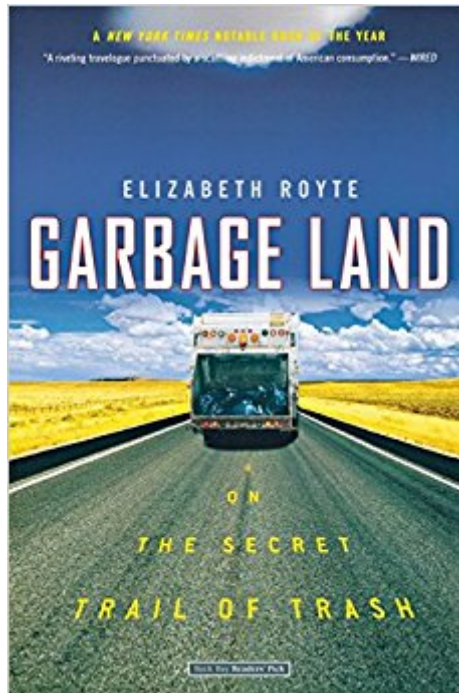




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# Garbage Land: On The Secret Trail Of Trash



## Synopsis

Out of sight, out of mind ... Into our trash cans go dead batteries, dirty diapers, bygone burritos, broken toys, tattered socks, eight-track cassettes, scratched CDs, banana peels.... But where do these things go next? In a country that consumes and then casts off more and more, what actually happens to the things we throw away? In *Garbage Land*, acclaimed science writer Elizabeth Royte leads us on the wild adventure that begins once our trash hits the bottom of the can. Along the way, we meet an odor chemist who explains why trash smells so bad; garbage fairies and recycling gurus; neighbors of massive waste dumps; CEOs making fortunes by encouraging waste or encouraging recycling-often both at the same time; scientists trying to revive our most polluted places; fertilizer fanatics and adventurers who kayak amid sewage; paper people, steel people, aluminum people, plastic people, and even a guy who swears by recycling human waste. With a wink and a nod and a tightly clasped nose, Royte takes us on a bizarre cultural tour through slime, stench, and heat-in other words, through the back end of our ever-more supersized lifestyles. By showing us what happens to the things we've "disposed of," Royte reminds us that our decisions about consumption and waste have a very real impact-and that unless we undertake radical change, the garbage we create will always be with us: in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we consume. Radiantly written and boldly reported, *Garbage Land* is a brilliant exploration into the soiled heart of the American trash can.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The v-p of a New York City waste transfer station recommends, "You want to solve the garbage problem? Stop eating. Stop living." Indeed, to ponder waste disposal is to confront the very limits of our society. Where does it all go? Most of us are content to shrug off the details—•as long as it's out of sight (and smell). Not so journalist Royte, whose book in some ways (including its title) echoes *Fast Food Nation*. That McDonald's is more immediately engaging a subject doesn't make, say, the massive, defunct Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island, N.Y., any less compelling. Royte nicely balances autobiographical elements (where does her Fig Newmans carton end up, anyway?), interviews and fieldwork with more technical research. Her method yields palpable benefits, not least a wealth of vivid refuse-related slang (maggots are known as disco rice). The details unavoidably venture into the nauseating on occasion, and some might find the chemistry of trichloroethane and other toxins a bit dull. As the NIMBY logic of waste disposal forces its practitioners into secrecy, Royte is obliged to engage in some entertainingly furtive skullduggery. All in all, this is a comprehensive, readable foray into a world we'd prefer not to heed—but should. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Royte is a journalist with a nose for the "sordid afterlife" of trash, thoroughly at home in the putrid world of "Coney Island whitefish" (used condoms); "disco rice" (maggots); and—the darling of American consumer culture and the nemesis of waste activists—"Satan's resin" (plastic). Her book takes the form of a quest for the surprising final resting places of her yogurt cups, beer bottles, personal computer, and organic-fig-cookie packaging, and leads to an impassioned attack on overconsumption in America. If Royte does not quite demonstrate the muckraking skills of an Eric Schlosser in *Fast Food Nation*, she does expose the feculent underside of our appetite for things and challenges her readers to disprove the resigned assessment of a former New York sanitation commissioner: "In the end, the garbage will win." Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I found the book interesting, especially since I will soon be working at a solid waste management company (which is the reason I wanted to do some research on the industry). The book is a bit disturbing because it highlights what a huge monster the waste cycle is, and it can make you feel a little hopeless at times, but I think it's important that it is highlighted because we need to recognize how much waste we generate before we are able to do anything about it. However, the reason I only gave it four stars is because the writing style was inconsistent to me. Some parts were very

intriguing and easy to get through, but other parts were too detailed or unnecessary. However, I do appreciate the story format of the book where she takes us on her garbage adventure with her.

A good attempt by the author to actually trace the flow of her own garbage and other waste through the system of collection, processing, and final disposal. It doesn't quite fully satisfy, but it is a good start on the path of searching out where a person's garbage goes. Some notes: 1) The author traces the path of her trash through both the recycling and the direct to the landfill dump. 2) On the way to the dump, she follows the garbage trucks (in a ride along) to the Transfer Station & then to the landfill dumps (when she is not allowed as many won't allow access to non-employees). 3) On the recycling side, she does the same, This time with a very good discussion of the economics of recycling. (A special note here is that recycling is basically a loss prone business in the US. Much recycling is repackaged and shipped to China on the return trips of those containers that bring us everything from shoes to cheap toys, all in packaging that must be either recycled, or stuffed into a landfill.) 4) She works on reducing her waste "footprint" by categorizing & sorting her trash. Also, she works on reducing her incoming stream of material (grocery store plastic bags as an example) that will go to either recycling, or the landfill. Some things of note: She does mention the amount of waste in a Fast Food Restaurant & follows the trail of the commercial side of the trash (what she gets when she buys a meal). She mentions the back end trash (what comes in the back door of the restaurant & then goes out that same back door to the dumpster). (As an aside, I was camping at a KOA this summer & next to the facility was a special dumpster that a fast food restaurant used only for paper & cardboard waste. The dumpster was full every night & was picked up for recycling on a daily basis!) That portion of our trash cycle (industrial & commercial waste) could be the genesis for another book. So, what does the book tell us of our society? Basically, we are a throw away society. Cheap goods, or goods that breakdown are thrown away more often than they are repaired, is our hallmark. We have trended into the no-deposit/no-return world of buy it & then, when done, toss it in the trash. The author talks about the deposit/redemption laws in several states & municipalities. She also notes that a returned container usually goes to the crusher (for glass), or the smelter (for aluminum cans). (I remember the returnable, 24 to a case, long necked beer bottles that disappeared in the 1990s. So, in commemoration of their disappearance, how about a Country Western Song titled, "Where have all the Long Necks Gone?") One final note: I had not considered the sheer volume of plastic that I personally go through in a typical weekly trash cycle until I read this book. And, that is only plastic bags in the grocery store & the packaging around the basic household items that I purchase (shampoo & etc.). The volume is sheer madness & seems to grow

even greater in volume every year!

I believe that every Fourth grader should visit a WasteWater treatment plant, a recycling MRF, a landfill, and a factory farm. They should know where their stuff comes from, and importantly where it 'goes'. Every adult who missed these 'days in school', should read this book. It's the next best thing to being there - up close and personal with garbage, where we all need to be if we are to raise consciousness about the dirty little secrets of trash management, reverse the misconceptions that 'garbage goes away' and start the process of seriously shifting to a more mindful consumption culture. I wouldn't be surprised to know that this book is required reading for college 'waste seminar' seniors. And what an enjoyable, fun read it is -- packed with amazing, eye-opening facts, anecdotes, and deep insights. I have re-read it a few times more now and keep mining more great insights.

#### Solid investigative journalism

I found this book to be very interesting because I happen to live in Brooklyn from where the author's garbage originates, so I know a lot of the locales referred to in the book. As I was reading I was wondering if someone outside of NY would agree. I think so. The introduction explaining her method of how she tracked her garbage by separating and weighing in granular detail was worth skipping for me. This is a personal journey for Elizabeth, so she included many of her feelings as well as methods of experimentation to reduce, re-use and recycle. But the most interesting parts for me were learning how the system works not just here in NYC, but everywhere. The bottom line is that your garbage never really goes away, it just gets moved someplace that you don't see it. She covers all of it, from recycling, to sewage, to waste of all strains. And it's not pretty, folks. It's a matter of time before it comes back to you in some form through dangerous poisons in your drinking water or food, being washed up on a nearby shore, or in the air you breathe. I personally think her efforts to reduce her own waste footprint, while admirable and noble, is too small to make a difference and the burden should be put on the massive industry that creates this junk that will either never break down or will wind up as lethal poisons. Just the by-products of manufacture of all the packaging and product is enough to ruin our food, air and water supply for thousands of years. This book is full of information everyone should be aware of and it got me thinking beyond my pail. It's not an easy pill to swallow, but Garbage Land made me aware of the scope of the problem and making industry responsible for their waste is now one of my personal issues. A follow-up book: A

nation like Japan has approximately the population of the USA in a country roughly the size of California...where do \*they\* put it all. I'd be interested.

It was an interesting topic, but the book was very repetitive and oversaturated in unnecessary details. It's not exactly an entertaining story, but it does have a lot of good points, main topics, and ideas. I'd recommend it to people who're really invested in the subject... Otherwise I doubt they'd finish it.

Well researched and entertainingly written.

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