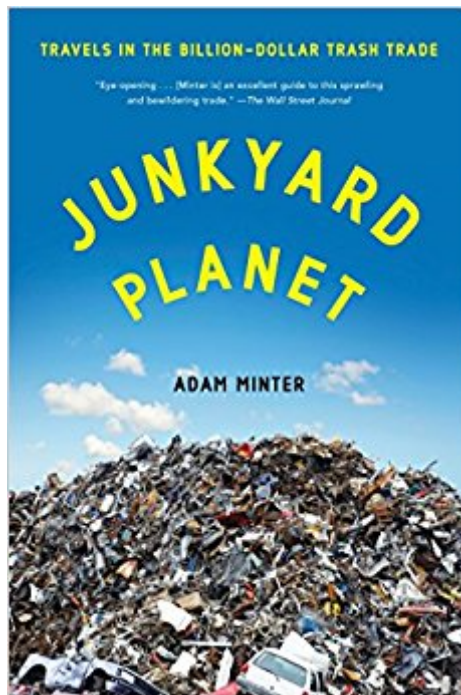




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Junkyard Planet: Travels In The Billion-Dollar Trash Trade



Synopsis

When you drop your Diet Coke can or yesterday's newspaper in the recycling bin, where does it go? Probably halfway around the world, to people and places that clean up what you don't want and turn it into something you can't wait to buy. In *Junkyard Planet*, Adam Minter--veteran journalist and son of an American junkyard owner--travels deep into a vast, often hidden, five-hundred-billion-dollar industry that's transforming our economy and environment. With unmatched access to and insight on the waste industry, and the explanatory gifts and an eye for detail worthy of a John McPhee or a William Langewiesche, Minter traces the export of America's junk and the massive profits that China and other rising nations earn from it. What emerges is an engaging, colorful, and sometimes troubling tale of how the way we consume and discard stuff fuels a world that recognizes value where Americans don't. *Junkyard Planet* reveals that Americans might need to learn a smarter way to take out the trash.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Growing up as the son of a scrap dealer in Minneapolis, Minter learned firsthand that one man's trash is truly another man's treasure. In his first book, the Shanghai-based journalist charts the globalization of the recycling trade, focusing on the U.S. and China, and featuring a cast that ranges from self-made scrap-metal tycoons to late-night garbage pickers. Notable passages include a trip to Wen'an, one of China's most notoriously polluted plants where employees process hazardous materials while wearing sandals. Minter successfully resists oversimplifying the issue China

currently faces a growing middle class demanding more raw materials for new construction, the options are living with the pollution caused by recycling or the environmental consequences of mining for raw materials. Minter takes readers through the Shanghai market where parts are harvested from second-hand electronics, but finds that the more complex the technology, the harder it is to reuse the metals. The scrap trade is one of the few business ventures possible in the developing world and this profession for outsiders shows no signs of slowing down. Minter concludes that the solution is in the first word in the phrase, Reduce. Reuse. Recycle. 2 16-page color inserts. (Nov.) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Out of sight, out of mind. That's the typical sentiment of even the most meticulous recycler who doesn't really think about where those carefully sorted cans, bottles, magazines and newspapers go after they've been picked up curbside. From big screen TVs to the tiniest of Christmas tree lights, there's a world of trash or, in the parlance, scrap out there. And lest one think that it all ends up in a landfill for future archaeologists to ponder, Minter is here to tell you that there's big money to be made in what American consumers and industries throw away. As he travels the world from Houston to Guangzhou, surveying the debris and discards that fill scrap yards and warehouses, Minter takes the reader into a world of commodities trading that is every bit as lucrative and cutthroat as anything on Wall Street. The son of a scrap man, Minter brings an insider's knowledge and appreciation for an industry that no one thinks about, everyone contributes to, and a lucky few profit from. --Carol Haggas --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The scrap yards that I remember from my youth were what the author refers to as auto junkyards. I always believed they were the one and only place where scrap went, whether it was a car being sold in pieces or put into a crusher and turned into a pile of junk metal. I never really knew that there were places that specialized in other types of scrap, but I soon learned about the long history of scrap yards as I read this book. The author takes the reader on a tour of the various types of scrap that exist. From electrical wire, to electric motors, to plastics, to cars and to steel and aluminum and many more, each type of scrap has a market and a place in the recycling pecking order. In addition, there are places in China that specialize in each of these types of scrap. Our garbage is China's, and to a lesser extent, India's raw materials from which new products spring. Each has a growing economy and a developing middle class that wants the same goods that are present in the United States. In addition, we are still addicted to buying inexpensive merchandise from China and the

"raw" materials have to come from somewhere. The easiest way to obtain those goods is to come to the United States and buy them from recyclers and scrap dealers. Although that would seem to be an expensive proposition; buying a container of scrap, shipping it to China and then separating it into useful parts, nothing could be further from the truth. The containers travel back to China virtually free. The shipping companies have to get the ships and containers back to China, and they would get nothing for an empty one way trip, so they offer deep discount shipping to get something to help cover the cost of fuel. And, getting the product ready is also inexpensive as labor in developing countries is also cheap. The author made several points worth pondering. One, if the developing world didn't buy our scrap, it would end up in landfills, filling them more quickly and burying materials that have significant value. In addition, by buying our scrap, these countries are not opening mines to find the raw materials, which saves the environment and cuts greenhouse gas emissions. Imagine how many emissions would come from a copper mine, where 100 tons of material have to be moved to extract one ton of copper ore. Although the methods of stripping wire, or melting plastic in China are hardly ideal, they beat the various alternatives available. The final take away from this book is that it is best to reduce your purchasing habits, then to reuse items as much as possible, and only then to recycle. It certainly opened my eyes. In addition, I found the book to be a wonderful read. The author wrote well, and despite some redundancy, the book is full of important information. I cannot recommend it highly enough!

This book is intense. I had no idea. In my continuing education about the global economy and what commodities are considered valuable, this was an essential read. I had been into the recycling craze back in the '70s (old hippie, giving away my age now...) and given it quite some thought over the years. Most recently I have questioned the wisdom of buying new vehicles every few years even to have one that gets better gas mileage (why I still have a 23 year old car that gets just as good mileage as many newer models, has no car payments and super low insurance). I have heard the environmental argument about the recycling plants in developing countries - so, duh, if you don't like it, stop consuming so much stuff and then throwing it out. Better to go to China and get reused on some level than to dump it in the landfill. The author got me thinking what else gets landfilled that some inventive and enterprising person is going to invent a way to reuse it. As far as the conditions over there and the pollution, let's quickly get some of the more basic problems handled like proper food and water. After that, the pollution and working conditions will become a priority. I even had some thoughts about going into the junk business myself. What a way to make money. But I suppose you might have to be that person who has pleasurable memories of Sunday mornings

strolling through the junk yard with your loved ones. If you are the least interested in a major sector of the global economy or you ever gave one thought about what happens after the County recycling truck picks up your recycling, read this book, it will astound you.

Had to buy this for a PolSci course and I honestly thought it was going to be a drudge to read through. However, I was amazingly surprised by how great it was. It is a well-written, great researched book. It gets into a lot of interesting "behind-the-scenes" details of how the recycling industry works. It was a great book that really makes one think about how good recycling ACTUALLY is for the environment. It is a great read and if you are one who loves interesting "did you know" facts, I would highly recommend it.

Anyone wrestling with the complexities of sustainability and recycling can appreciate Adam Minter's insights gathered from his personal experience in the family scrapyard, his travels across the United States, and his fact finding trips throughout China. Minter enlightens us about the overall economics that drive the multi-billion dollar scrap industry, which includes those of us trading our soda pop cans, plastic bottles, and contaminated aluminum window frames for cash at the local recycling center, and extends to the larger players who fill the empty shipping containers returning to China with our scrap. We have done well enough that our largesse and convenience have made possible a steady stream of recyclables that are building the fortunes of scrap industry titans worldwide, raising the standard of living of some, and diminishing the health of others. Our affluenza begs the question, "What do we do with our scrap and waste?" And, before we point the finger in condemnation of the unecological and unhealthy practices employed by others recycling our waste, can we demonstrate a viable, economical, better way? After all, they wouldn't have this mess unless our consumerism hadn't commissioned it. Kudos to Adam Minter for producing a smooth read to start the discussion. More laws and regulations may only add a complexity driving up costs to the consumer, and the crafty will set aside or ignore. Until the thinking of the consuming public can be elevated, we won't be able to hire the captains of industry to help us clean up our mess.

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