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Reno, Joshua

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At a time when waste studies are of increasing interest to anthropologists, Joshua Reno's *Waste Away* offers critical insights into how ever expanding landfills make life possible in the contemporary United States and Canada. For Reno, landfills are not agglomerations of inert matter. Rather, he explores how things that become "mass waste" – including dented coffee cans, condemned trailer homes, and other refuse – mark complex histories that are obscured as they are literally and figuratively compacted together. Using case studies from Four Corners, a landfill on the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan, Reno argues that rendering discarded things into landfills allows for the maintenance of what he calls "reproducible sameness" through new material goods. By following how the leftovers of production and consumption congeal, *Waste Away* identifies landfills as the material foundation of contemporary North American capitalism.

*Waste Away* builds from more than three years of fieldwork with waste workers, managers, and activists, weaving together a combination of fieldnotes, drawings, and analytic threads to convey the sensory experiences of mass waste. Chapter One demonstrates how sanitary landfills rely on human, technological, and microbial labors to inter tons of waste. Despite efforts by landfill laborers, managers, and environmental regulators, landfills are leaky entities, as sights, smells, and contaminants escape built environments designed to contain them. Four Corners remains in

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operation despite imperfect regulatory structures and environmental quality concerns because, in the words of one manager, “The garbage keeps coming.”

Part of Reno’s fieldwork was spent as a laborer at Four Corners, a job that allowed him to account for the people who make landfill operations possible. Chapter Two traces how landfills become a profitable investment, both for multinational firms who profit as they are filled, as well as for laborers and managers who work in them. In particular, Reno explores how the stigma of waste work makes it a fraught proposition for the white, male laborers who are most exposed to the sensorial and corporeal effects of landfill waste. Still, as industrial manufacturing labor becomes increasingly precarious – particularly in Southeastern Michigan – ever increasing volumes of waste offer opportunities to maintain racialized and gendered aspirations to middle-class status. Further, Chapter Three examines how laborers and operators “salvaging” goods from Four Corners refigure ordinary logics of middle-class consumption. By recovering things from the waste stream, whether for momentary amusement or long-term use, they also call into question the limits of property claims granting multinational firms sole rights to own and profit from waste.

*Waste Away* pivots from the daily operations of Four Corners to discuss how the landfill came to be located in what Reno calls Harrison Township. In part, this results from what waste studies scholars have called a “path of least resistance” contoured by racialized inequalities. Chapter Four expands on this narrative through a historical consideration of how places taken to be “rural” are presumed to be empty spaces that can be filled up by trash. Reno highlights how such an imaginaries resonate with frontier myths that elided the presence of native peoples for the benefit of white settlers. This insight dovetails with Chapter Five, which argues that waste economies are always already racial economies. Reno sketches how Four Corners, Harrison, and Michigan have been made through tensions between white and black residents, complicating this picture with accounts of Sikh garbage haulers presumed to be “Arab,” and First Nation appeals to environmental justice that resulted in Canadian trash being imported to Four Corners. In so doing, *Waste Away* attends to how landfills come to embody racialized anxieties and tensions between nation-states.

As Reno makes sense of the operations of Four Corners, he argues that waste work is an act of care for North American societies because the ability to make unwanted things go “away” is integral to the reproduction of capitalist logics. This said, the disposition of North Americans toward their waste only emerges in glimmers. Most of these glimpses are Reno’s own explicitly self-conscious reflections on his relationship to the things he throws away. While such reflections do give some color to a more general view, they sit in stark contrast with the rich descriptions of life and work around Four Corners. This is but a minor critique, and goes more to demonstrate the difficulty of investigating waste streams that span an entire continent than to any shortcoming of the book. To this end, *Waste Away* is an incisive account that sheds fresh light on uneven intersections of waste, work, value, and the environment, giving it relevance for scholars of North America and elsewhere.

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