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### The Trashy Americans

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The Trashy Americans:  
An Honors Thesis

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Submitted: May 6, 2019

## Introduction

As of late, garbage has been getting more and more attention. Photos depicting mounds of trash like something out of the movie *Wall-E* seem a bit distant and even apocalyptic to our modern American sensibilities. “Surely not,” we think as we scrape kitchen scraps into the can. Most of us have no idea how much waste we actually produce.

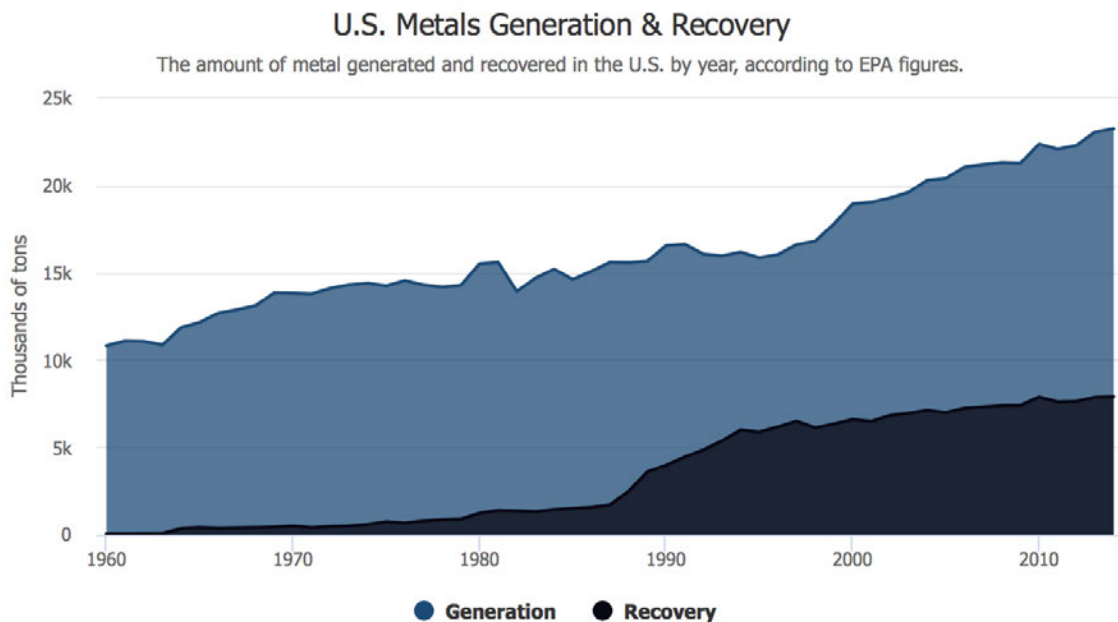
It is my intent over the course of this work to make you, dear reader, aware of the present realities of our modern American lifestyle. The statistics I will present will not be flattering, so if you are looking for validation, stop reading now.

I do not, however, intend to leave you in a place of despair and self-loathing. Instead, it is my goal to present you with ways to improve yourself and thus help to quell the stream of refuse teeming on our shores.

## Municipal Solid Waste in America

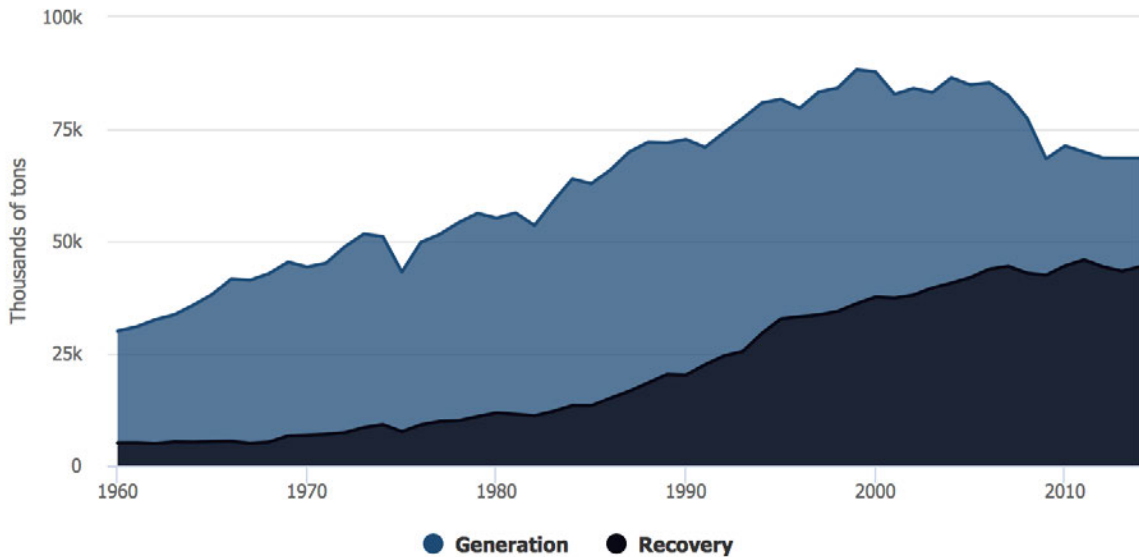
Of all the countries in the world, the United States ranks number one in per capita production of municipal solid waste: 1,675 pounds per person per year (Nation Master). This type of waste is defined by the EPA and other organizations as “common household wastes as well as office and retail wastes” (University of Michigan). This measure does not take into account any industrial, construction, or hazardous wastes.

The four most common types of recyclable material that are thrown out are paper, glass, metal, and plastic. Of these, in 2014, 65% of all paper waste generated was recycled, 34% of metal, 26% of glass, and 10% of plastic. This may seem pretty good, but consider that in 2014 of all the waste produced only 26% was recycled. 9% was composted, 13% was incinerated (with or without using the energy produced by incineration), leaving the remaining 52% to be sent to landfills. This may not sound like a lot, but 52% represents 135,920,000 tons of waste. Landfilling waste creates a toxic solution called leachate, which is comprised of any liquids that get tossed out: food residue, household cleaning products, toothpaste, and water that mixes with all the plastics in



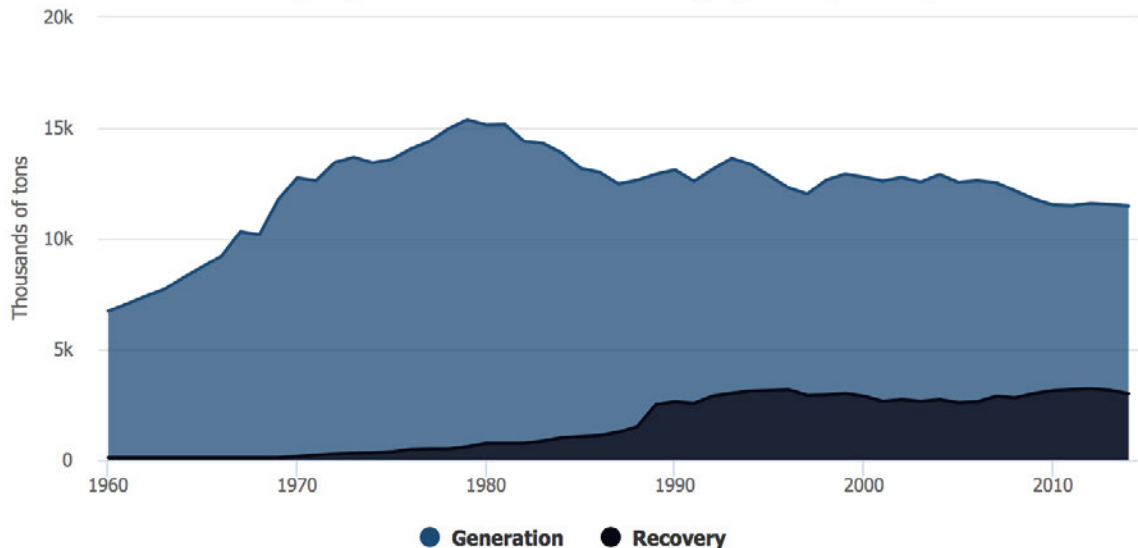
### U.S. Paper Generation & Recovery

The amount of paper generated and recovered in the U.S. by year, according to EPA figures.



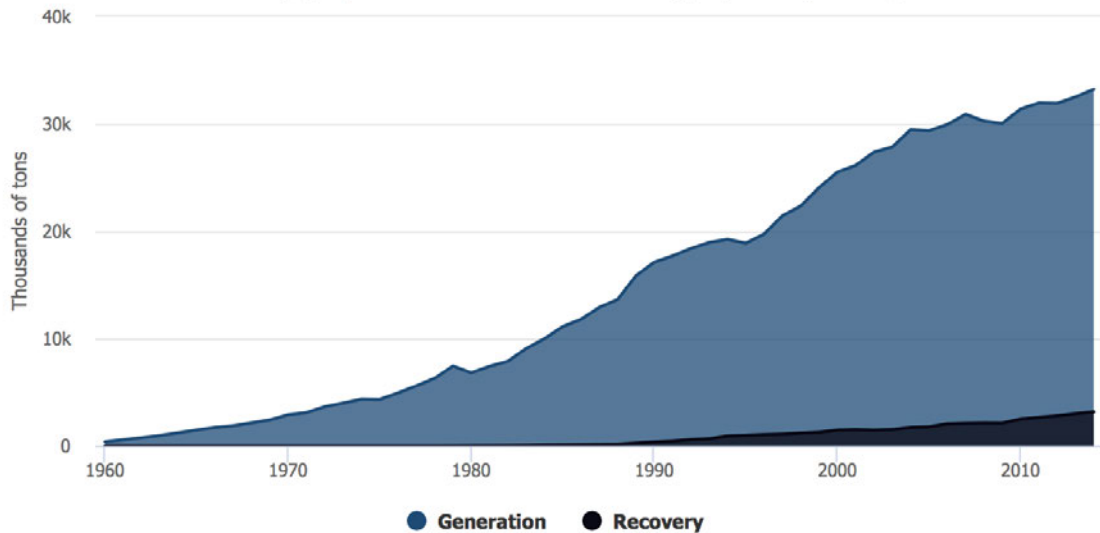
### U.S. Glass Generation & Recovery

The amount of glass generated and recovered in the U.S. by year, according to EPA figures.



### U.S. Plastics Generation & Recovery

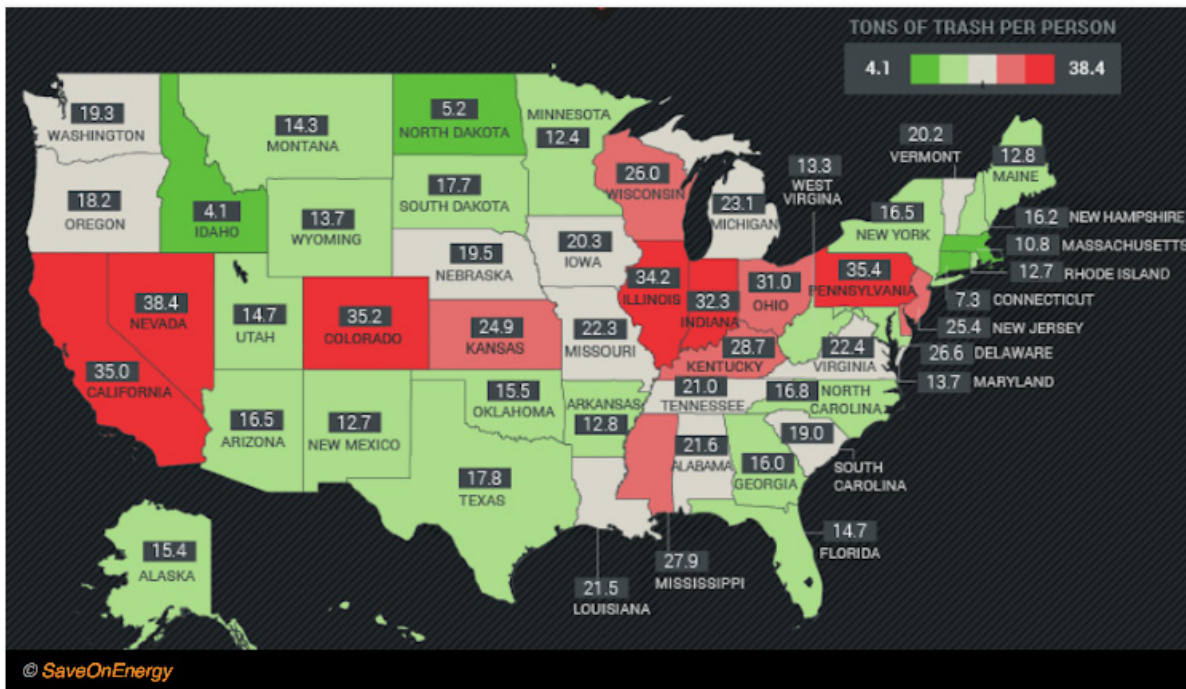
The amount of paper generated and recovered in the U.S. by year, according to EPA figures.



the pile. The leachate will eventually seep out of the landfill, no matter how well constructed, and can contaminate the groundwater. Landfills also put off scores of methane gas, contaminating the atmosphere as well as the water supply (Leonard).

But landfills can't take all of the blame. Incinerating waste is one of the worst methods of disposal, especially if the waste being burned includes any type of plastic. Plastics are made with several harmful chemicals (think about the things your teacher told you not to sniff in chemistry class), especially chlorine. When burned, these harmful compounds are released into a crucible of sorts and react to form a super-toxin known as dioxin (Leonard).

Even recycling is not always the best answer. Materials like glass and metal can be recycled again and again without losing their properties. However, when paper and plastic are recycled, the resulting product is of lower quality (recycling printer paper results in newspaper quality paper) so the original product must be replaced with virgin materials.



Of course, the amount of waste produced across the country varies a bit. The lowest per capita production came from Idaho at 4.1 pounds per person per day, or 1,496.5 pounds per person per year. The highest figure came from Pennsylvania at 35.4 pounds per person per day, or 12,921 pounds per person per year (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). Wherever you fall in the spectrum, this data does not represent a sustainable system for the industrialized world.

### Background Knowledge for America

The United States is a vast nation, often touted as the “Land of Opportunity”. As the third largest nation in the world (by area) it is brimming with natural resources, and one important but overlooked resource: space. The US comprises 9,833,517 square kilometers (Central Intelligence Agency), the equivalent of more than



526,213,915 football fields. It's difficult to imagine size on that scale, but consider this: to drive from Monterey, California on the west coast to Virginia Beach, Virginia on the east coast would take at least 44 hours. That's nearly 2 days of continuous driving to make it across the contiguous United States, to say nothing of Alaska and Hawaii. Alaska itself is as large as about a third of Europe (not including Russia).



Having a lot of space means we have a lot of space for landfills. It's convenient to just dump our trash in the ground because we still have ground enough to waste on garbage disposal. Smaller nations, or more densely populated ones, do not have this "luxury". Because of this, we haven't yet felt the pressure to come up with other ways of disposal, or the pressure to produce less waste in general. The efficiency of our waste management system works against us here. Because we aren't forced to live with the waste we create, we don't see it as a pressing issue, when in fact we are destroying our land, one trash bag at a time.

Other natural resources within the United States include coal, copper, lead, molybdenum, phosphate, rare earth elements, uranium, bauxite, gold, iron, mercury, nickel, potash (a nutrient form of potassium), silver, tungsten, zinc, petroleum, natural gas, timber, and arable land (Central Intelligence Agency). This includes 27% of the world's coal supply. With such a variety and amount of resources, it is easy to forget that most of these substances are available in a fixed quantity. Only timber is renewable, and then only if we curate the forests correctly. This perception of the permanence of resources has contributed to the wastefulness and overconsumption in this nation. Because we feel that we will never run out of our resources, we feel no need to stop producing things we don't need with those resources.

There is another way to measure the size of the nation: population. As of July 2018, the United States has a population of 329,256,465, making it the third most populous country in the world after China and India. The fact that the third most populous country has the highest global rate of waste production per capita should

be concerning. Taking the lowest figure for per capita waste production per day and applying it to the entire US, the nation would be producing 1,349,951,507 tons of municipal solid waste per day. Keep in mind, this is the low-ball estimate. All of this waste must be disposed of and treated in some manner, leading us back to landfills, incinerators, recycling, and composting. This is a major issue that needs a lasting solution before our land fills up.

## **Government and Politics in America**

In the United States, it is very difficult for political parties aside from Republicans and Democrats to gain enough votes to earn a seat in Congress. Environmental law then, is largely dependent on the views and priorities of the two major parties. According to Pew Research Center, the two parties have become increasingly polarized on this issue. In the 2016 presidential election, 32 percent of Trump supporters said that the environment was “very important” to their vote as opposed to 69 percent of Clinton supporters that said the same (Pew Research Center).

Unfortunately, even those who make environmental issues a priority in voting don’t see climate change and associated issues as a personal-level problem but rather as a country-level problem only. A survey conducted by the University of Chicago ranked the relative importance of eight political issues. These included health care, education, crime, immigration, terrorism, poverty, the economy, and the environment. Only 3.6 percent of the US respondents listed the environment as America’s most pressing issue. This survey was distributed in multiple countries and while 14.6 percent of the total respondents set the environment in the number one place of importance, only 9 percent said it was the most important for them individually (University of Chicago). Pew Research Center supports this data. In 2016, 75 percent of Americans said that they were “particularly concerned” about the environment, but only 20 percent made efforts in their daily lives that reflected that conviction “all of the time” (Pew Research Center).

Not only is the creation of environmental law divided by political party, but its implementation is fragmented by state. While the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a federal bureaucratic institution, sets limits on emissions and standards for water quality, the states have their own individual standards (USLegal). This creates a landscape of uneven laws and practices, allowing polluting industries to set up shop in states with lower environmental standards.

Even larger issues like the Paris Climate Agreement have become the responsibility of the states. After the US withdrew from the agreement in 2017, 17 states joined to form the United States Climate Alliance, a “bipartisan coalition of governors committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement” (United States Climate Alliance). This shows that the environment is an important issue for many in the states, but we as a nation have a long way to go before these attitudes make their way into the majority parties.

Fortunately, there are many outlets for concerned citizens to lobby for environmental interests at both the state and federal level. As the responsibility for environmental policy is increasingly foisted on the states,

the former becomes more vital (and is fortunately more accessible).

A study from 2017 investigated the 5 smallest states (by population) concerning political involvement on behalf of the environment (Carter). It found that many environmental groups have become rather “professional” and bureaucratic as a result of their connection to the natural sciences, a highly specialized field. However, these institutionalized interest groups grew from grassroots efforts, and the potential for this type of activism still exists.

According to Carter (who defines political involvement as attending public meetings on local issues) the most conducive environment for civic involvement is geographically small, rural, population dense, flourishing economically (both on an individual and collective scale), and allows for direct democracy. Let’s unpack that for a second. A small state makes travelling to the capitol much easier than in a large state. That means an activist, or group of activists, can be physically present to air their opinions to lawmakers with less than a day’s worth of travel time. As I’m sure most of us know from experience, it is much harder to ignore an actual person than it is to ignore their emails.

Rural areas offer a more convenient access to local politics. Governing bodies in rural places perform fewer essential tasks than those in urban settings (because they are needed for fewer tasks, not necessarily because they are ineffective). This difference shapes the local perception of the role and necessary size of government, leading to an increasingly stark political divide between the two demographics. Urban areas tend to lean more towards the Democratic Party while rural areas tend to lean towards the Republican Party (Carter, 95). As we have already seen, these groups are quite polarized.

Population density, particularly referring to the density of a voting district, also plays a role in political involvement. The more compact the district, the more personalized the policies become. Also, as in geographically small areas, compact areas allow for greater access to local politicians.

The strength of an area’s economy and the standard of living of its citizens are closely related, so we will discuss them jointly here. A strong economy enables the government to entertain more programs, both those that serve environmental interests and those that do not, than a municipality with a weaker economy. This is significant because in order for advocates to have any real effect, there must first be the potential for change. In most cases, this has something to do with money. Individual wealth, and more importantly, standard of living, can act as a metric for how involved the citizenry is in local politics. This, however, is often contingent on how much certain industries contribute to the local standard of living. For example, a community that benefits economically from coal mining will likely resist policies that put restrictions on coal mining. The potential for local involvement also determines how much change can be enacted.

One way that citizens can participate in grassroots efforts is through initiatives and referendums. These are processes of direct democracy in which individuals and groups can propose legislation to be voted on if they first obtain a certain number of signatures from registered voters. This means that the citizens have the power to bypass the legislative body and get important issues to a general election ballot. Unfortunately, only 25 of the 50 states currently have systems in place that allow for this type of political involvement. However, the opportuni-



ties open to grassroots movements, however few they are in the context of the nation, open doors in the government that are otherwise closed by the two-party system.

## **Consumerism**

Since the 1950s the consumer attitudes and practices of Americans have changed dramatically. The average person consumes twice as many goods (Bedoni, 8) now compared to the average person in the 1950s. This trend can actually be traced back to the 1920s when brand names and automobiles became staples in the consumer diet, thus bringing rise to the consumer society we find ourselves entrenched in today (Durning, 29). Mass consumption was seen as the key to building a strong economy.

Following the Second World War, economists were searching for ways to make the economy more productive and prevent falling into another depression. Victor Lebow, a retail analyst, made his plan abundantly clear:

“Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, replaced, and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate.”

This is precisely what has happened. Only about 1% of goods purchased in North America are still in use 6 months after the date of sale. The other 99% has made its way to the garbage (Bedoni, 7-8). Americans alone throw away 7.5 million TVs every year, as of 1992 (Durning, 95). Even our pace of life has increased. A study by California State University measured benchmarks such as the average speeds of walking and speaking. The results revealed that the richest nations, or those with more developed economies, physically moved faster than less developed nations.

Yet despite this ever-accelerated rate of consumption, we aren't finding our spiritual satisfaction in consumer goods. In fact, national happiness in the US has actually been declining since the 1950s, which just so happens to be the same era Americans became obsessed with consumption (Tides Foundation).

But wait! There's more! Not only are our consumption habits making us miserable, they're taking a heavy toll on the earth. In 1977, Ivan Illich stated that “industrial society has created an urban landscape that is unfit for people unless they devour each day their own weight in metals and fuels”(Durning). This observation isn't that far from the truth. In a lifetime, the average American throws away 600 times his or her body weight (University of Utah) to say nothing of the industrial waste required to make those products. Among these mounds of garbage you could recycle enough steel to rebuild Manhattan and enough aluminum to reconstruct the entire commercial air fleet four times every year. We have clearly followed Lebow's directive to consume and discard.

Unfortunately, there are finite amounts of the resources we toss out so flippantly. Our rate of consumption will, and indeed may already have, exceed the available reserves of raw materials we require to maintain

this consumer society. As we have done with our products, we need to throw out this system and get a new one.

## **Planned Obsolescence**

One of the tools producers use to accomplish Lebow's directive is called planned obsolescence. This is the practice of intentionally creating a product that fails after a short period of time (but not so short that the consumer loses faith in the product) so that the consumer has to buy a new one. Planned obsolescence is the response to reaching the saturations levels for many goods in the postwar economy (Whiteley, 5). This means that most people already owned things like a refrigerator, and thus had no need to purchase one. Because the American economy was and is dependent on high consumption to generate wealth, the consumers had to be stimulated to keep buying. Enter planned obsolescence. Because the products were designed to fail, the consumer would be forced to replace it. If you had a refrigerator and it broke down, you would probably go buy a new one, thus solving the problem of market saturation. Even in the few years that I've been old enough to notice, I can tell that the life spans for products like light bulbs and batteries have grown shorter and shorter.

Even the machines that manufacture these goods have fallen prey to planned obsolescence. In the 1950s, they were made mostly of metal, and the parts were connected with bolts or welding. Now, many mechanized parts are made of plastic and are impossible to repair. If a single component fails, the entire machine must be replaced (Durning, 94).

The manufacturing companies aren't even ashamed of it either. For many years, they included planned obsolescence designs in the blueprints for their products, and several books have been written on how to use this tool to benefit the producers. As I was researching for this project, I expected to encounter difficulties in dredging up information on this topic, but I only needed a cursory Google search to find a wealth of sources incriminating the American manufacturing system.

Unfortunately, the production industry doesn't just use planned obsolescence. With the rise of the middle class in the 50s and 60s, more families relocated to the newly built suburbs. In these areas, the racial and socioeconomic demographics were relatively homogenized. Thus the way people expressed their status became based on the quality of their possessions, especially those like automobiles that could be seen without entering the house (Whiteley, 96). This in turn gave rise to perceived obsolescence, more commonly known as fashion trends. Manufacturers would change the aesthetic of their product with little or no improvement upon its functionality. They would roll out the exact same car in a different color or with a customizable option. This practice is also used to stimulate consumers to buy new products sooner than they need to, thus boosting the economy.

Think about it. When a new line of seasonal clothing comes out, it rarely looks anything like last year's trend. Thus, the producers are in essence peer pressuring the consumers into buying their product in order to be favorably viewed by society. Oscar Wilde put it this way: "What is fashion? ... It is usually a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months." (Durning, 95)

The clothing industry, particularly the women's fashion industry, has become a champion at the use of perceived obsolescence. The outlandish styles (just take a look at the 80s) and ephemeral trends flood the

market and make it difficult to find a style that has any staying power. This means that even if you purchase your clothing with no regard for the current style, you will likely end up with several trendy pieces in your closet. However, these pieces likely won't match the ones you already own, either forcing you to purchase more clothing or leave the new acquisition unworn. All this is despite the fact that we actually need very little clothing to function in our daily lives. Many people have experimented lately with "capsule wardrobes" that contain roughly 30 items total. All of the examples I've run across look professional and attractive (and surprisingly non-repetitive). If you'd like to see these examples for yourself, search "capsule wardrobe" on YouTube for several options. These individuals focused on getting the most function out of their clothes. Members of the fashion industry even admit that their trends are a bit superfluous. Kevin Ventrudo of LA Gear told the Washington Post, "If you talk about shoe performance, you only need one or two pairs. If you're talking fashion, you're talking endless pairs of shoes." (Durning, 96) This is exactly what the industry wants us to buy: endless amounts of items that we don't need in order to live a functional and fulfilling life.

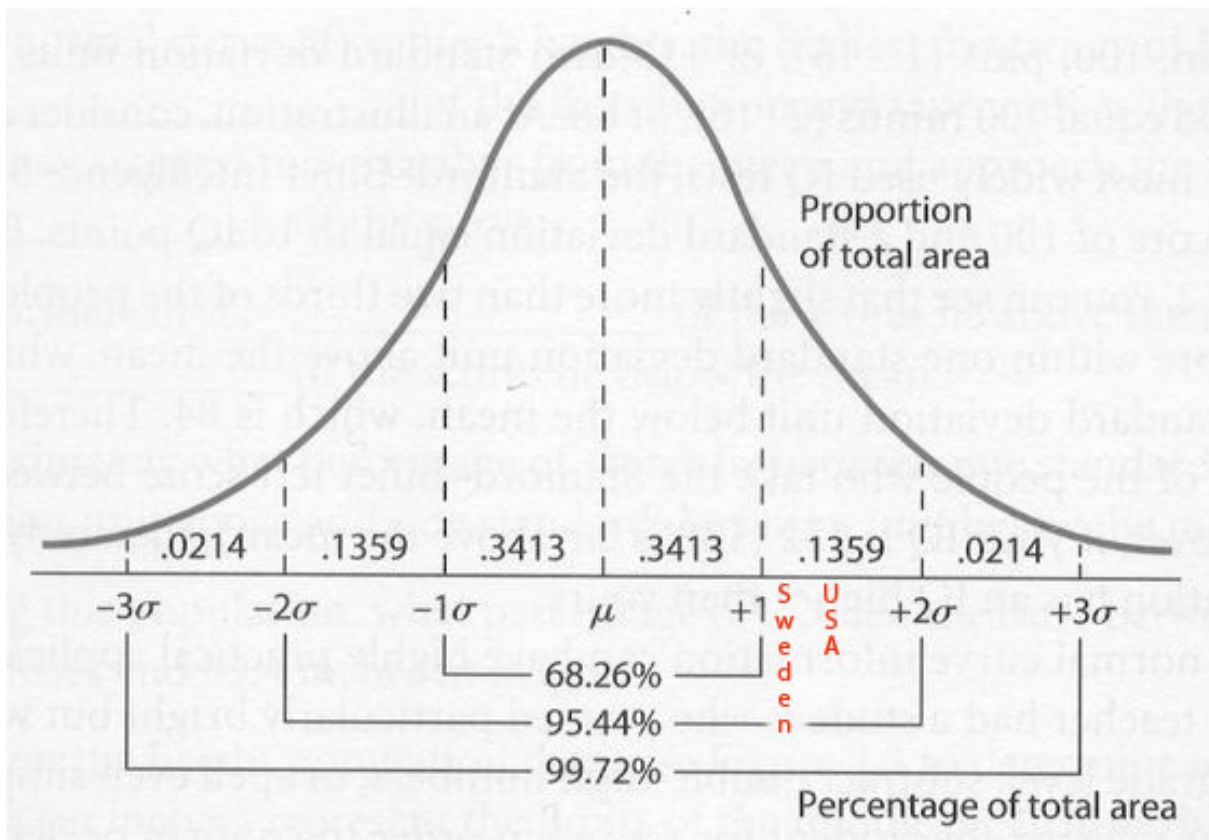
The good news is that we as consumers have some control over planned and perceived obsolescence. Manufacturers will conduct themselves in a certain way so long as it profits them to do so. If consumers refuse to purchase items that don't last, can't be easily repaired, or will be out of style in a few months, we can create a larger market for well-made products and classic styles.

This exact thing occurred in the mid-1960s. At this point, American automakers had been subscribing to planned obsolescence for more than a decade, and the average American car on the market had 24 defects, several of which were safety related. These automobiles were fuel inefficient and ill equipped for rising gas prices. Consumers responded and sought out higher quality products from Germany and Japan. Sales of American made cars fell by nearly half between 1978 and 1982 as imported products carved out their share of the market. In response, American manufacturers redesigned their cars to fit what consumers were purchasing (History.com Editors).



## Why Sweden?

Now we will take a look at another industrialized nation to compare the US to one of its global counterparts. Originally, Sweden was chosen for this study because it is touted as one of the world leaders in recycling. As I looked further, however, Sweden became a clear choice on the basis of other qualifications as well. I investigated the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita for both of these countries. Since the GDP is the current accepted measure of economic success, the GDP per capita communicates something about the standard of living. It is by no means universal as this creates an equal distribution of wealth within the nation (if one person makes \$100 and nine make \$0, the GDP per capita would be \$10), but I believe it to be a reliable means of determining whether the nations are comparable. The United States has a per capita GDP of \$59,800 and Sweden has a per capita GDP of \$51,200, both in 2017 dollars (Central Intelligence Agency). I also took the liberty of compiling the per capita GDP for every country listed in the database and constructing a normal distribution. This gives a better feel for how closely related these statistics are, and how close they are to the average per capita GDP. The normal score for the US is 1.47 and the normal score for Sweden is 1.12. This is calculated when the average is 0 and the standard deviation is 1, so a score of less than -3 or a score of more than 3 would be considered unusual. From this data, we can see that in the grand scheme of things these data points are very close to each other and are reasonably close to average.



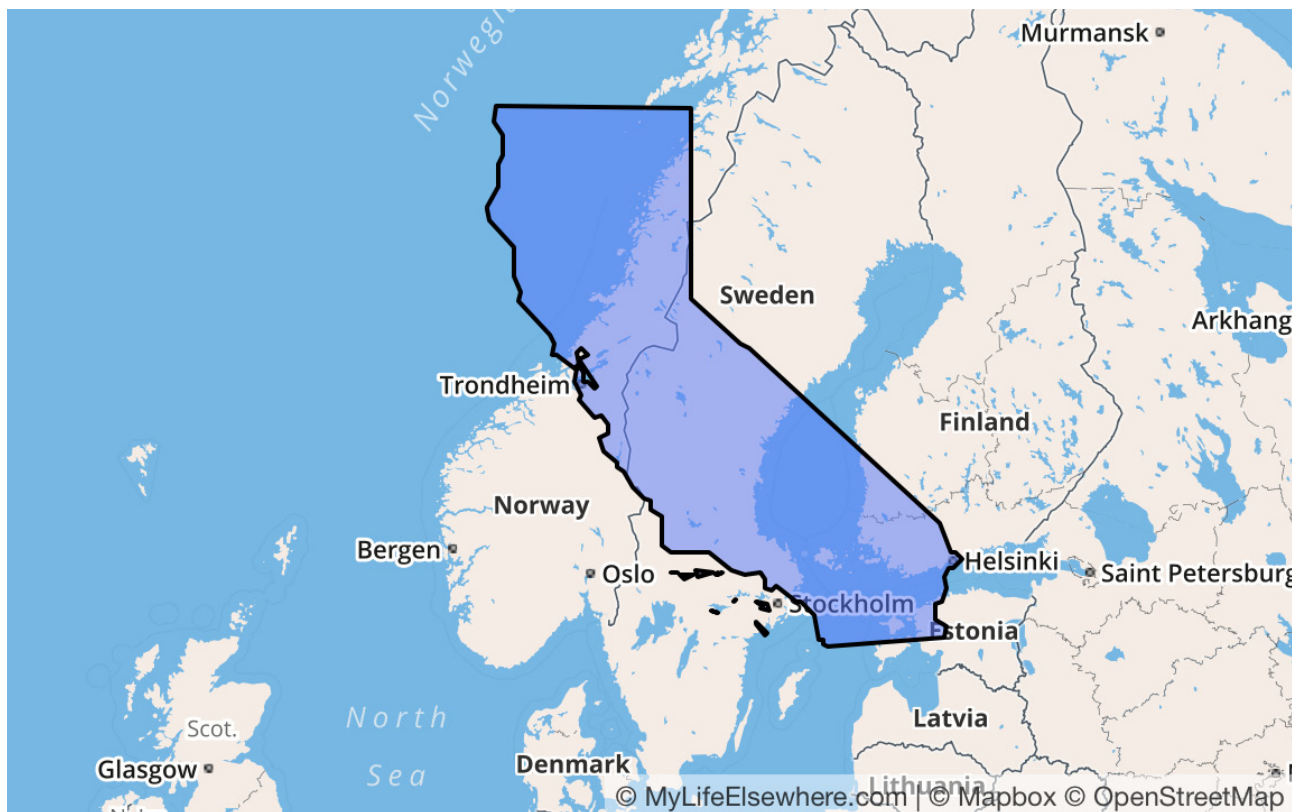
What does all this math-speak mean? It means that the United States and Sweden have similar levels of individual wealth, and thus it is reasonable to compare the consumption and waste practices of the two. What makes Sweden more likely to recycle and pursue greener methods of waste management than the US?



## Background Knowledge for Sweden

So let's talk about Sweden. Geographically, it is about the size of California. Based on population, it is about the size of Michigan, about 10 million people. Sweden is ranked 57th in size by area and 91st in size by population (Central Intelligence Agency). Of the more than 450,000 square kilometers of land, 68.7% is forest. Most of the population lives in the south and along the coasts, 87.4% in cities.

Right away, it is apparent that Sweden does not have the natural resources of the United States. The land is rich in iron ore, copper, lead, zinc, gold, silver, tungsten, uranium, arsenic, feldspar, and timber. The nation also taps into its potential for hydropower. With less space and fewer resources, it makes sense that the Swedes would look for alternatives to landfilling and would steward their resources more judiciously.



## Government and Politics in Sweden

Before we can accurately compare Sweden and the United States, it is essential that we know a bit about how the Swedish State functions. In contrast to our own government, Sweden is run by a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. This is the same system that the United Kingdom operates under. Their chief of state is a hereditary monarch, but the head of government is the Prime Minister, who is usually the leader of the majority party or coalition in the legislature. The Swedish legislature is actually the branch that I would like to emphasize here. It is a unicameral system (the United States has a bicameral legislature, meaning two assemblies: the Senate and the House of Representatives). The members of this parliament, or Riksdag, are elected by a propor-



tional representative vote. This means that every political party with at least 4% of the national popular vote or at least 12% of the vote in one of the 21 counties receives a representative in the Riksdag (Norwegian Center for Research Data).

According to the CIA World Factbook, as of September 9, 2018, the majority party in the Riksdag is the Swedish Social Democratic Party, holding 28.31% of the vote and 100 of the 349 seats. The Green Party received the lowest percentage of the vote (4.4%) and holds 16 seats. The Green Party's ideology can be condensed into three forms of solidarity: solidarity with animals, nature, and the ecological system, solidarity with coming generations, and solidarity with the world's people (Revolvy). While they don't hold a lot of influence, their voices are still heard in the assembly by virtue of the proportional representation model. Additionally, even though the Social Democrats' platform isn't built entirely on improving environmental policy, they have made informal alliances with the Green Party to work towards these policies (Revolvy).

### **Comparing Municipal Solid Waste in America and Sweden**

Right away we can tell a difference in the amount of waste produced per capita by these two nations. Sweden ranks as number 16 in annual per capita waste production at 992 pounds of waste per person. This in itself is a decrease by nearly half from what the US produces. What makes the difference?

For starters, most European countries are more environmentally conscious than the United States. This attitude stems from two main causes. First, there is significantly less space available, so Europeans tend to "co-habit" with the land and are thus more aware of their effects on it (Rosenthal). Second, there is more of a social pressure to be an environmentally responsible citizen.

Both of these attitudes are leveraged in the way the Swedes handle their waste. Biodegradable waste has been banned from landfills (Energy News Network) as have plastic bottles that don't conform to recycling stipulations (Baltic21.org). By law, there is never a recycling center more than 300 meters away from any municipal area (Fredén). The waste policy in the European Union as a whole follows a hierarchy: waste prevention, re-use of products, recycling of material, recovery of energy, and final disposal (CO2 neutral). The Swedes excel at the fourth step in the chain by means of incineration. About half of all household waste in Sweden is burned, and the resulting energy is used to heat homes and provide electricity (Fredén). The incinerators in Sweden are fitted with a series of filters that ensure that the resulting emissions that exit the plant are below the regulated level (Energy News Network). After the waste has been burned, the metals are separated from the rest of the ash and recycled, and anything else like tile or porcelain that won't burn is sifted out and used as gravel for road construction. The ashes themselves are disposed of in a landfill under the requirements for handling hazardous waste. The Swedes use this process so much that they have had to import 2.7 million tons of municipal solid waste from other countries to keep the heat on (Fredén).

This system is not without its flaws. None of the sources I found either confirmed or denied that plastics were a part of the waste being burned. Whether or not this is the case, most emissions are still harmful to the environment. Additionally, the toxic ash at the end of the process will contribute to leachate in the landfill.

Sweden does have other methods of waste management that differ from the United States. In the United States we pay a flat fee as part of our municipal taxes to have our garbage collected by the city. In Sweden, municipalities are permitted to charge tariffs based on weight or volume to encourage citizens to produce less waste. The tariffs offer a financial incentive to waste less. It also creates an environment of self-efficacy and civic responsibility. Under this system, people have more motivation to recycle and thus feel more empowered to do so. The nation also requires that food waste be separated from other household waste so that it can be composted. However, this law is not enforced but rather left up to the citizens to self-regulate (Andersson, 1-2).

Interestingly enough, a weight-based tariff was attempted in Charlottesville, Virginia with very different results. Instead of an increase in recycling or a decrease in household waste, the system produced an increase of illegal dumping and incineration. This was determined in a 1996 survey in which households could respond that they had a) attempted to reduce the amount of household waste, b) increased recycling, c) increased composting, d) started asking for items in less packaging at the store, or e) increased “other” ways of waste disposal. Since all the legal options available are in responses a) through d), any household that selected response e) was counted as using illegal disposal methods. The study concluded that anywhere from 28% to 43% of the decrease in the amount of waste produced stemmed from illegal disposal (Andersson, 5).

## **Conclusion**

So what is there to be done? Surely this issue is too large for concerned individuals to conquer. In part, this is correct. It will take policy-level changes in the way waste is managed and societal-level changes in the way waste is perceived to reduce the amount of waste we produce as a nation. However, eventually, societal pressures influence policy, and society is comprised of individuals.

Many people are already taking steps toward reducing waste as individuals and as a society. There are some people who have taken this to the extreme and began a “zero-waste” lifestyle. People like Bea Johnson in California and Lauren Singer in New York have committed to sending zero waste to landfills. This involves a major overhaul in the way they eat, travel, shop, and even shower. They compost food waste, avoid purchasing products with excess packaging, Lauren even makes her own toothpaste (and shared the tutorial on YouTube). The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) outlines the nine core values of a Zero Waste lifestyle:

“

1. Reducing consumption and discards
2. Reusing discards
3. Extending producer responsibility
4. Comprehensive recycling
5. Comprehensive composting or biodigestion of organic materials
6. Citizen participation
7. A ban on waste incineration
8. Improving product design upstream to eliminate toxics and instead design for durability and repair
9. Effective policies, regulations, incentives, and financing structures to support these systems” (Leonard,

As I've experimented with a few zero-waste swaps myself, I've found that most of these ideas aren't even close to new. Instead of using plastic bags to pack a snack, you can roll it in a napkin and tie it up (a Lauren Singer solution). When I excitedly shared my new trick with my mom, she remarked that her mother used to do something similar. It amazes me that in just two generations we have forgotten so many of the sustainable solutions to everyday problems. At the same time, this is rather encouraging; instead of having to develop new ways of doing things, we just have to revert to a few of the old.

Besides individual efforts to reduce waste, you can contact the governing bodies in your state that regulate waste management and other environmental interests. There are websites (like <https://wasteadvantagemag.com/what-organizations-are-in-your-state/>) that will give information on the branches of the state bureaucracies that handle these issues. More importantly, you can vote for political candidates who will be open to changing the way we treat waste.

Yes, this is a problem of massive proportions. No one person can fix this alone. We have seen evidence that there are strategies outside of our current course. It's time to change the way we think about our habits of consumption and waste, and keep ourselves from destroying the Land of Opportunity.

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