



# Cash For Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America

*Carl A. Zimring*

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Over the past two decades, concern about the environment has brought with it a tremendous increase in recycling in the United States and around the world. For many, it has become not only a civic, but also a moral obligation. Long before our growing levels of waste became an environmental concern, however, recycling was a part of everyday life for many Americans, and for a variety of reasons. From rural peddlers who traded kitchen goods for scrap metal to urban children who gathered rags in exchange for coal, individuals have been finding ways to reuse discarded materials for hundreds of years.

In *Cash for Your Trash*, Carl A. Zimring provides a fascinating history of scrap recycling, from colonial times to the present. Moving beyond the environmental developments that have shaped modern recycling enterprises, Zimring offers a unique cultural and economic portrait of the private businesses that made large-scale recycling possible. Because it was particularly common for immigrants to own or operate a scrap business in the nineteenth century, the history of the industry reveals much about ethnic relationships and inequalities in American cities. Readers are introduced to the scrapworkers, brokers, and entrepreneurs who, like the materials they handled, were often marginalized.

Integrating findings from archival, industrial, and demographic records, *Cash for Your Trash* demonstrates that over the years recycling has served purposes far beyond environmental protection. Its history and evolution reveals notions of Americanism, the immigrant experience, and the development of small business in this country.

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