



Freegans: Diving into the Wealth of Food Waste in America

Alex V. Barnard

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If capitalism is such an efficient system, why does 40 percent of all U.S. food production go to waste—while one in six people in the nation face hunger? This startling truth has stirred increasing interest and action of late, but none so radical as that of the freegans, who live on what capitalism throws away—including food culled from supermarket dumpsters. *Freegans* is a close look at the people in this movement, offering a broader perspective on ethical consumption and the changing nature of capitalism.

Freegans object to the overconsumption and environmental degradation on which they claim our economic order depends, and they register that dissent by opting out of it, recovering, redistributing, and consuming wasted goods, from dumpster-dived food to cast-off clothes and furniture. Through several years of fieldwork and in-depth interviews with freegans in New York City, Alex Barnard has created a portrait of freegans that leads to questions about ethical consumption—like buying organic, fair trade, or vegan—and the search for effective forms of action in an era of political disillusionment.

Barnard's analysis of this pressing concern reveals how waste is integrally bound up with our food system. At the same time, by showing that markets do not seamlessly translate preferences expressed at the cash register into changes in production, *Freegans* exposes the limits of consumer activism.

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