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Review of *PLASTIC OCEAN: How a Sea Captain's Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans*

**Summary**

*PLASTIC OCEAN: How a Sea Captain's Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans* by Captain Charles Moore and Cassandra Phillips. Plastic has been the top pollutant on a global scale; many environmental activists and scientists across the globe realized plastic pollution is a severe problem to humankind and other species, and they are working hard to address the issue. Captain Moore is one of the enthusiasts on the matter. This book tells the story of Captain Moore's journey on plastic research in the ocean; this book is more like a memoir or a chronicle than a heavy read non-fiction scientific book. Captain Moore started the journey in August 1997 from Honolulu, Hawaii to Santa Barbara, California. In between the Pacific Ocean, Captain Moore and his crew members found huge gyres of plastic debris floating on top of the ocean surface, as well as in the bottom and middle layers of the ocean. Indeed, those gyres are often referring as The Great North Pacific Garbage Patch. The team had to capture the plastic gyres and bring them back to the laboratory to examine and study the origin of the pollutant and prevention strategies. Captain Moore detailly lays out the process of researching plastic debris in the ocean, from building the voyage ship, Alguita, to talking government authorities to establish policies on controlling plastic waste. After the journey, Captain Moore continues his passion for reducing plastic waste in the ocean; he has a personal website to track the matter and formed numerous foundations to inform the public about the plastic pollution in the marine environment, and work with other reputable scientists.

I chose this book to read because I saw a YouTube video, “20 Books to Read about Pollution and or Climate Change,” and *Plastic Ocean* was on the recommendation list and sounded like an adventurous book; that is something I like.

**Review**

One of the major themes in the book is we are at the age of throwaway living. Captain Moore explains that the majority of the plastic waste found in the middle of the ocean comes from consumer goods, such as balloons, bottles, bottle caps, single-use bags, food wrappers, straws, etc. These large numbers of plastic debris strongly impact the marine environment, from large mammals whales to tiny phytoplankton, which inhale carbon dioxide and release oxygen to the marine atmosphere.

I 100% agree with Captain Moore that we live in the age of throwaway living; there is always a product that will fit an individual’s budget, especially those consumed frequently; they are meant to throw away. Indeed, the reason for those affordable products is because we are also at the age of technology advancement, “[t]echnology and disposability were similarly entwined. Equipment that could mass-produce paper cups, cartoons, and bags, and glass bottles and metal cans, arrived in the decades around 1900.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The efficient production line helps to cut down the cost of a product, but it also means that most consumers take less care of that product. And its packaging? Most likely ends up in the trash bin and not in the recycle. Especially true in the younger generation, we love everything fast and convenient, ramen, fast food chains, snacks, and technology. As I am writing this, I have a trash bin full of snacks plastic bags, another Amazon box full of plastic waste, and a box of packaging from technology gadgets that I recently purchased. So much plastic waste! I feel shame… Indeed, we are also in the consumerism age, always purchasing. When a product breaks, we will most likely buy another one since fixing stopped being a routine in many households, and probably it is more expensive to fix than purchase.

The second central theme in the book is many policies on plastic waste are widely ignored. The book points out numerous international and local policies regarding plastic waste management in the ocean. However, the majority of the plastic waste still ends up in landfills or floating on the ocean's surface.

In the 1970s, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, also known as MARPOL, aims to reduce pollution in the marine environment. However, many ships worldwide ignore the MARPOL protocols and continue dumping millions of tons of plastic and other waste into the ocean each year. Luckily, waste from ships is easier to track the point source pollution, and there can be sanctions imposed on those ships violating the policy. But only if someone is pulling out the trash in the ocean. Surprisingly, I learned that one of the major polluters is the U.S. Navy, “[t]he U.S Navy may be the worst ocean polluter the world has ever known, having secretly dumped, by its own account, 64 million pounds of nerve and mustard agents into the sea, along with 400,000 chemical-filled bombs, land mines, and rocket, and more than 500 tons of radioactive waste-either tossed overboard or packed into the holds of scuttled vessels.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Truly, if the authority does not uphold the policies, it will be tough for civilians to follow those regulations. Therefore, we all need to recognize the importance of the regulations in place and actually abide them.

Finally, the book's third theme is we need an efficient recycling system. Germany in the 1990s was one of the first countries to come up with a reliable recycle system called the Green Dot Compliance Program, with different color-coded trash bins to collect different types of recycled and non-recycled household waste. In the program, the packaging industry also pays an amount, $1.5 per kilogram of packaging, and that cost is used to cover the cost of recycling waste materials. Within a decade, the recycling cost went down 75%, and 2020 was the deadline for closing all German landfills. As I further research, landfills operation in Germany remains minimal in 2022, and their goal is to shut down all landfills within the next two decades.

Furthermore, Captain Moore explains, “[a]n important aspect of recycling is uniformity. Uniformity in production. Uniformity in collection. And uniformity in mandated recycling. This uniformity is economical, yet it goes against the promotion of individuality and local control in the United States.”[[3]](#footnote-3) I agree with Captain Moore. However, I have seen China doing a similar recycling program like Germany, but it was unsuccessful. And China strives to build uniformity, as socialism/communism are ingrained in many Chinese people. I believe that a Green Dot Compliance Program isn’t enough, especially big countries like the US and China. Besides government legislation, everyone needs to learn how to recycle. We need a mandate Recycle 101 course in every school, and start with our youth.

**Conclusion**

Overall, I want to give this book a 4.5 out of 5, 5/5 for Captain Moore’s dedication of his life in helping the world to be a better place, even though he was a college dropout, but his knowledge and passion inspired me. 4 out of 5 for organization of the book, because sometimes the author does not stay on track of the chapter and goes on to another topic.

I would recommend this book to everyone that is interested in starting an environmental project, people who cares about the environment, people who cares about plastic waste, people who cares about the marine environment, and everyone in DHC 180.

Citation

Cable, Courtney. “Book Review: Plastic Ocean: How a Sea Captain’s Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans by Capt. Charles Moore.” seattlepi.com, November 26, 2011. <https://www.seattlepi.com/lifestyle/blogcritics/article/Book-Review-Plastic-Ocean-How-a-Sea-Captain-s-2293587.php>.

Moore, Charles, and Cassandra Phillips. *Plastic Ocean: How a Sea Captain's Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save*. Avery pub Group, 2011.

Kirkus Reviews. *PLASTIC OCEAN | Kirkus Reviews*. Accessed March 7, 2022. <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/charles-moore/plastic-ocean/>.

1. Charles Moore and Cassandra Phillips, *PLASTIC OCEAN: How a Sea Captain’s Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans* (Avery pub Group, 2011): #1315. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, #972. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid,#3899. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)