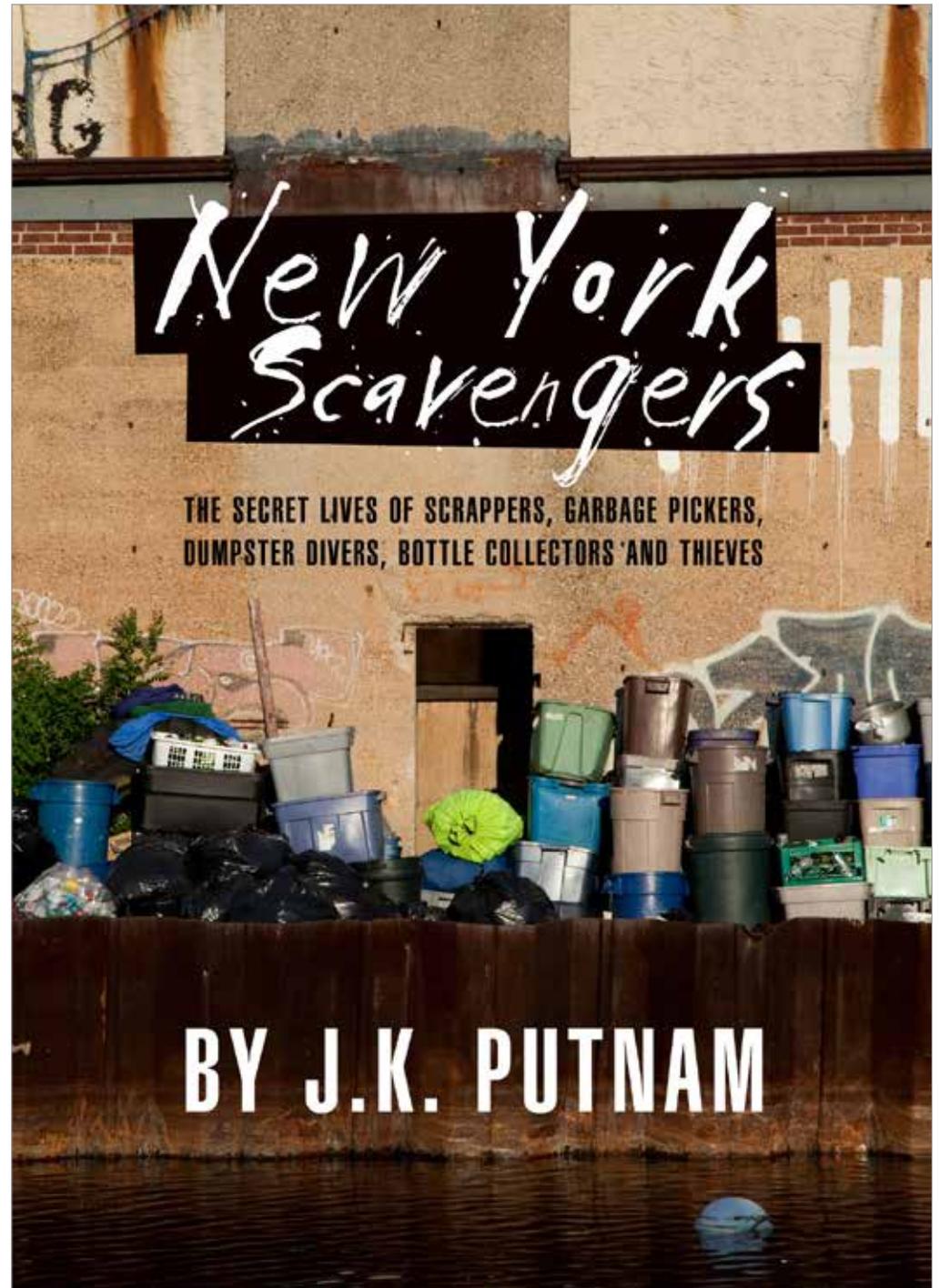




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BOUTIQUE BOOK PACKAGERS



New York Scavengers

THE SECRET LIVES OF SCRAPPERS, GARBAGE PICKERS,
DUMPSTER DIVERS, BOTTLE COLLECTORS AND THIEVES

BY J.K. PUTNAM

NEW YORK SCAVENGERS

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Book Proposal
by J.K. Putnam

PROPOSED SPECS:

Hardcover/Paperback
5 x 7 inches (12.7 x 17.78 cm)
over 100 color photographs
180 pages

ABOUT NEW YORK SCAVENGERS

You've seen them digging through the trash and refuse that accumulates in all cities, searching for recyclable items to trade in for cash: street scavengers. These men and women brave harsh conditions (and hefty fines with the Department of Sanitation) for minimal gain, mostly because they've been unable to find, or hold, steady work. But each one of these individuals has a story. Photographer J.K. Putnam shadowed these men and women to reveal the lives behind their hidden faces.

New York City recycles 11,000 tons of trash a day—around 4 million tons a year. What doesn't get picked up by city workers is collected as “mongo,” slang used to describe garbage salvaged from streets or trash heaps. The term is also applied to the scavengers, and NYC is home to thousands of these mongo workers (although an accurate stat is nearly impossible to pull together).

New York Scavengers is the first in-depth, photo-journalistic book to document and study these less-than-fortunate souls. Putnam has explored the city and turned his lens toward what most ignore. Some mongo break into abandoned buildings and strip metal and wiring to be sold for scrap. Some look for furniture, first edition books, televisions, and other small electronics to be flipped on the grey market. Others simply look for empty beer, soda, juice, and water bottles, slugging them over their shoulder in oversized trash bags or pushed along, usually stacked ten or more feet high, in old rusty shopping carts. Pasties, magazines, sushi, vegetables, coins, ginkgo, bicycle parts, jewelry—everything lost, thrown out, or stolen is then collected from the streets by a seemingly tireless workforce that depends on the waste of humanity to survive.

Take Derek, for instance. Brooklyn born and bred, he's a Gulf War veteran and an unemployed construction worker. He's also a father, a family man, a person desperate to make his monthly rent. Putnam writes: “As I exited out of a passageway created by two diesel trucks a man in a neon yellow safety vest stopped me and asked that I not take any pictures. Derek moved passed the man, never looking back, pulling his shopping cart piled high with every bit of metal he had found that

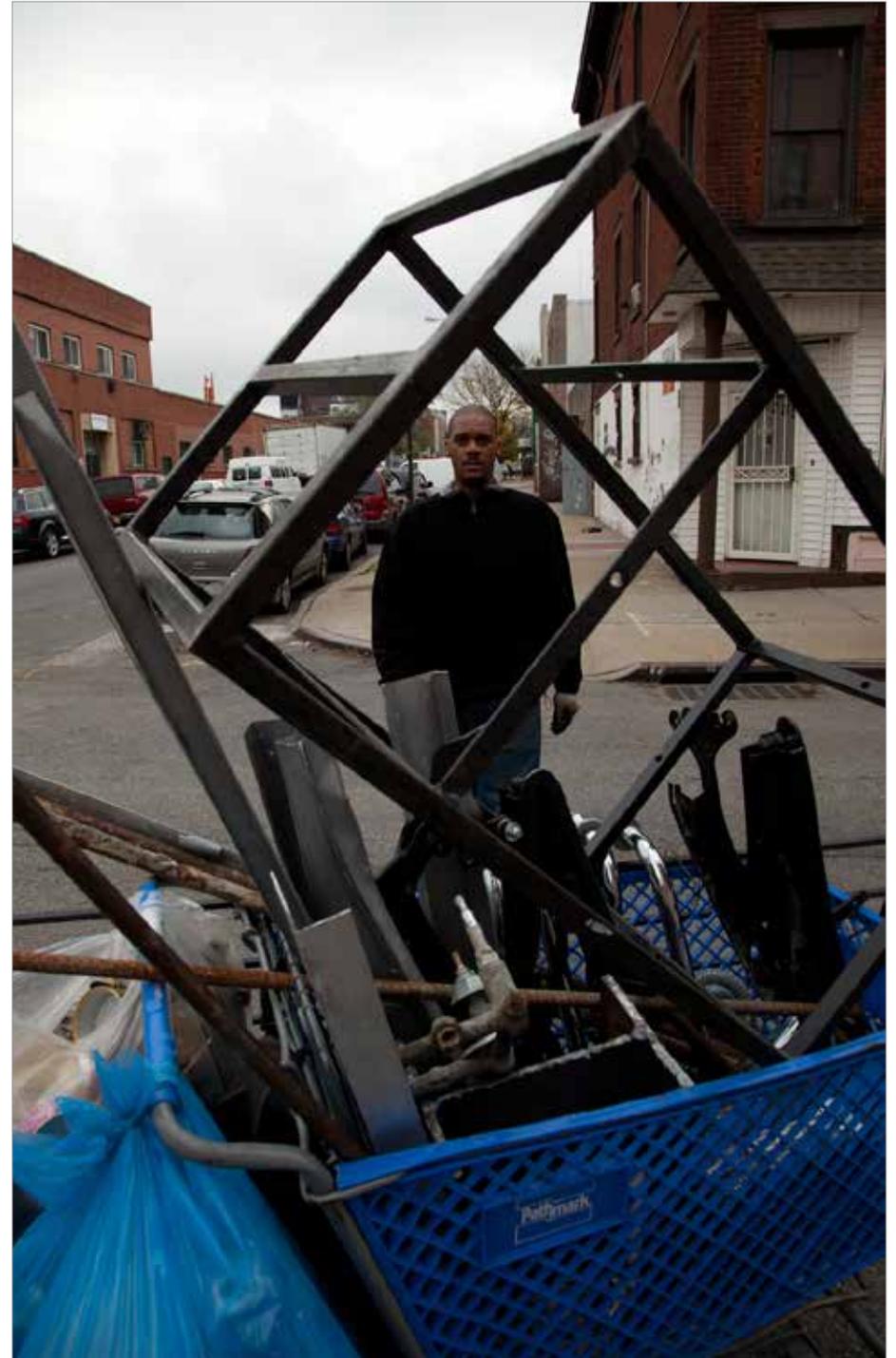


morning. I had followed Derek into the mouth of a bustling scrapyards, our destination. All around me grease and soot covered trucks and vans unloaded their freight in one chaotic flow of junk and metal. The trucks unloaded hundreds to thousands of pounds of metal piled into various industrial containers. Tattered hampers piled high with steel and iron and aluminum and copper were shuffled into the yard and returned empty to collect the next load. The metal came in the shape of plumbing, iron work, car parts, bicycles, curtain rods, bed frames, cable. As I stood outside the yard waiting for Derek to return three dirty men struggled to pull a wrecked motorcycle from the back of a truck and into a hamper. The condition of the trucks and the familiarity in which the men who worked out of them moved in and out of the scrapyards showed a routine. This was their business, they worked in teams and in volume. Derek had been doing this on his own for two years, but not by choice, and his load was much more humble. His morning's work had earned him \$27, beating his average by at least \$10."

While many industrious urban denizens have taken to the scavenger life as an alternative lifestyle choice, there are all too many people who have no choice in the matter. Through interviews and photographs documenting their work and lifestyle, *New York Scavengers* aims to explain the why and how of the people making use of the things that we don't want because they have no other choice. They are scrap-pickers, garbage pickers, dumpster divers, bottle collectors, and thieves. They are poor, homeless, jobless, addicts, immigrants, and providers. They are all scavengers.

AUTHOR BIO

J.K. Putnam is the co-author of *DECAY* and has been featured in over a dozen other photography and design books. His work has been published by Mark Batty Publisher, *The Brooklyn Paper*, *The New York Daily News*, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, *Overflow Magazine*, and *nationalgeographic.com*. His photography has taken him from Asia to Africa to Alaska to Australia, specializing in documentary, cultural, and wilderness photography. Putnam lives and works in New York City.



MARKET ASSESSMENT

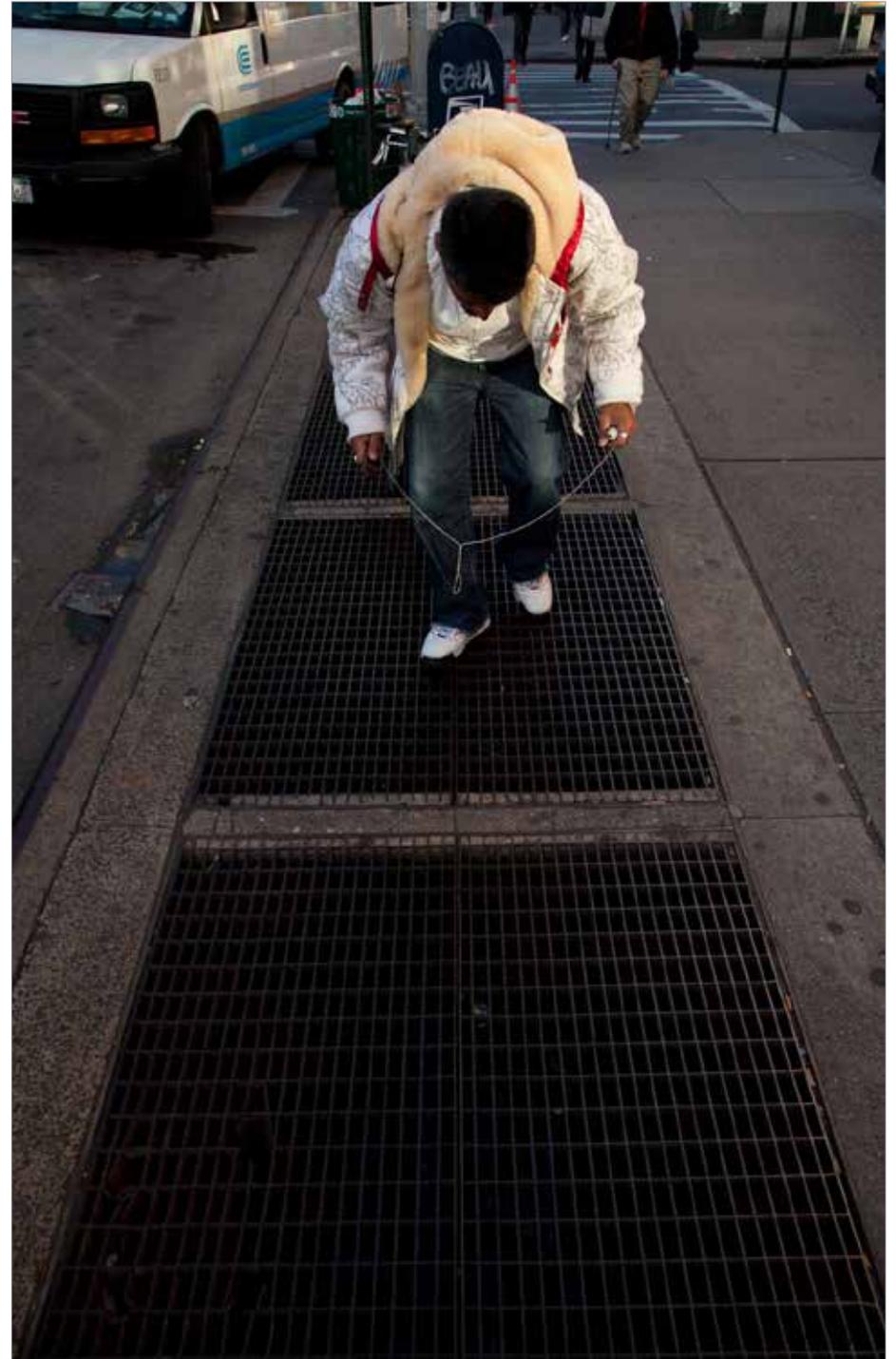
Foraging is a contemporary trend for some, but not for the subjects of this book: Mushroom hunters, “freegans,” and dumpster divers search out free stuff because they can; scavengers do it out of necessity.

One result of a sputtering economy: Not all scavengers are drug addicts or mentally ill; many of them simply have no better options when it comes to trying to make some money.

Intimate photography and first-hand reporting: J.K. Putnam has spent time with his subjects, resulting in an honest documentation of the realities of the twenty-first century global economy’s impact on a local level.

SIMILAR TITLES

- *When Trash Becomes Art* by Lea Vergine (Skira, 2007)
- *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage* by Heather Rogers (New Press, 2006)
- *Mongo: Adventures in Trash* by Ted Botha (Bloomsbury, 2004)







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