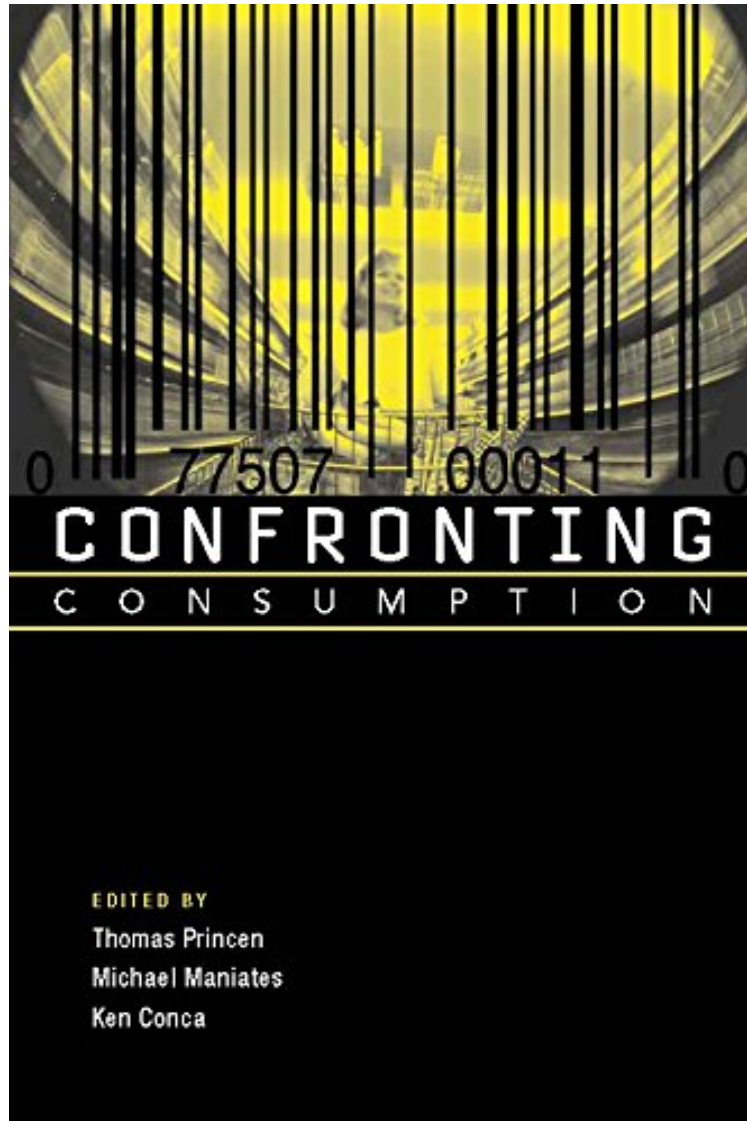


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## Confronting Consumption (MIT Press)

*Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, Ken Conca*  
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**Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, Ken Conca : Confronting Consumption (MIT Press)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confronting Consumption (MIT Press):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A book of essays, sometimes heavy, sometimes important but sometimes even delightful. By Andrew Wilson This is a rather good book, a series of essays edited by three professors in the fields of politics, natural resources and environmental science, all of whom contributed essays. Despite being a bit heavy-going in places, it contains some important insights, a number of interesting ones and a few rather delightful ones. I found the discussion of the limitations of the reduce-recycle-reclaim, green-choice, tree-planting, bike-riding and similar individual-responsibility paradigms refreshingly frank. The explanations of how we lose sight of the

environmental and social consequences of our consumption through 'distancing' and 'shadowing' were more difficult to stay with but important; likewise the chapter on the commoditization-value of various things and how it skews our attention (eg away from friendship and towards mind-altering drugs!). The inversion of the 'stages of production' to 'stages of consumption' is an insight that to me shifts this book up to 'important' status. The explanation of "frontier" styles of exploit-and-move (slash and burn) resource management was enlightening and, happily, crisp. I shared the pleasure of reviewer "takeadayoff" in the section on the Voluntary Simplicity Movement. I also enjoyed the section on off-grid power people and what actually motivates them, and the sections on more subversive ideas such as Adbusters and the power of organisations such as the Forest Stewardship Council. I would recommend this book in general to any readers intrigued by the title, but particularly to students in the fields of politics, economics and resource management and also to jaded eco-warriors who see the need to develop new ways to promote the conservation message. 24 of 28 people found the following review helpful. Best Book in Global Environmental Affairs By A Customer This award-winning book ("The Best Book in Global Environmental Affairs" according to the International Studies Association) offers an accessible and engaging analysis of the 800 pound gorilla in the living room that environmentalists find difficult to talk about with force: overconsumption. The early portion of the book documents the problem; the middle chunk offers a set of mental lenses for making sense of our quandry; and the final chapters offer real-life stories of actors and movements (the voluntary simplicity movement, for example, and the home power and local currency movements too) challenging the upward escalating trajectory of the consumption of "stuff." What's especially helpful about the book -- in addition to its "something for everyone" flavor -- is that it moves beyond simplistic prescriptions to "squash advertising" or "buy recycled products." Indeed, it is rather skeptical of these measures, which it tends to view as diversionary activities meant to take our eye off the underlying forces at war with the planet. Instead, it offers strategies for coming together collectively to challenge broader powers and structures that make it so difficult for people worried about the future of the planet to live more with less. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By MaggieNYC Excellent!

Comforting terms such as "sustainable development" and "green production" frame environmental debate by stressing technology (not green enough), economic growth (not enough in the right places), and population (too large). Concern about consumption emerges, if at all, in benign ways; as calls for green purchasing or more recycling, or for small changes in production processes. Many academics, policymakers, and journalists, in fact, accept the economists' view of consumption as nothing less than the purpose of the economy. Yet many people have a troubled, intuitive understanding that tinkering at the margins of production and purchasing will not put society on an ecologically and socially sustainable path. *Confronting Consumption* places consumption at the center of debate by conceptualizing "the consumption problem" and documenting diverse efforts to confront it. In Part 1, the book frames consumption as a problem of political and ecological economy, emphasizing core concepts of individualization and commoditization. Part 2 develops the idea of distancing and examines transnational chains of consumption in the context of economic globalization. Part 3 describes citizen action through local currencies, home power, voluntary simplicity, "ad-busting," and product certification. Together, the chapters propose "cautious consuming" and "better producing" as an activist and policy response to environmental problems. The book concludes that confronting consumption must become a driving focus of contemporary environmental scholarship and activism.

"The issue of excessive, careless, and ignorant consumption has been conspicuously absent in all the talk about sustainability. No longer! These essays break new conceptual ground and clarify the dynamics of consumption with intellectual honesty and political boldness. The authors aim to transform consumption from mindless and destructive to mindful and regenerative. This is a vitally important book!" (David W. Orr, Environmental Studies Program, Oberlin College) A Comprehensive analysis of how and why consumer society wreaks havoc on Earth. (syracuseculturalworkers.org)...an excellent exploration of what could turn out to be one of the frontrank issues of our time. (Norman Myers Nature) Are you willing to confront consumption?...then read this book. (Vicki Robin Journal of Positive Futures) The authors are to be commended for breaking the code of silence surrounding consumption and engaging the debate. (Richard Walther's Green @ Work Magazine) The book certainly succeeds in thinking 'outside the box'... (Global Environmental Politics) This book is important not just for its brilliance but for its rarity: few environmental scholars have dared to take on this issue in a manner that goes beyond rhetorical posturing and 'limits to growth' type arguments. (Lamont C. Hempel, Hedco Professor of Environmental Studies and Director of Environmental Programs, University of Redlands) Consumption deserves serious attention. This volume moves the literature beyond the work of a few isolated scholars and consumption activists to a collective enterprise of solid researchers critiquing and building on each other's contributions. Long overdue, but worth waiting for. (Richard B. Norgaard, University of California, Berkeley) *Confronting Consumption* provides a fresh new look at the systemic problems of consumption in the global economy. It offers a highly readable account of the impacts of consumerism on our vulnerable planetary resources and asks whether a sustainable consumption movement may be emerging. Scholars, teachers, and activists alike will be enriched by the book's analysis and inspired by new possibilities for confronting

the complexities of consumption. (Carolyn Merchant, Professor of Environmental History, Philosophy, and Ethics, University of California, Berkeley, author of *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* and *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*) A dynamic, vital book that takes your breath away! *Confronting Consumption* shows why consumption is the blockbuster problem that our society can no longer ignore. Readers will feel real excitement as they explore this stimulating book and will begin to understand why thousands of people in the Simplicity movement are turning their backs on 'getting and spending' and reclaiming 'the good life' -- building lives of high satisfaction and low environmental impact in a caring and just community. (Cecile Andrews, author of *The Circle of Simplicity*) This book addresses, to spectacular effect, the great silence about the vast appetite for resources in contemporary North America. These wide-ranging analyses of consumerism successfully bring together the cultural and the ecological, the structural and the symbolic, the local and the global. They join rights to responsibilities and ethics to public policy. In terms of both vision and execution, this is a landmark volume. (Ramachandra Guha, author of *Environmentalism: A Global History*)

About the Author  
Michael Maniates is Associate Professor of Political Science and Environmental Science at Allegheny College.  
Ken Conca is Associate Professor of Government and Politics and Director of the Harrison Program on the Future Global Agenda at the University of Maryland.  
Thomas Princen is the author of *The Logic of Sufficiency* (2005) and lead editor of *Confronting Consumption* (2002), both published by the MIT Press and both winners of the International Studies Association's Harold and Margaret Sprout Award for best book on international environmental affairs. He teaches social and ecological sustainability at the University of Michigan.