

# Professor's book gives 'trashy' view of history

by Beverly Hamilton  
Battalion Reporter  
The first historical study of garbage, written by Dr. Martin

Melosi, associate professor of history at Texas A&M University, will be at the public's disposal Feb. 22.

Melosi's book, "Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment, 1880-1980," addresses an aspect of environ-

mental history rarely dealt with by historians and includes environmental, economic, political, technological, social and inter-governmental themes.

Melosi, who has been at Texas A&M since 1975, said he became intrigued by the subject after enrolling in a research seminar on environmental problems as a graduate student at the University of Texas.

Melosi's book is based on information from municipal documents, census data, popular and technical periodicals and reports of various civic organizations acquired from 1875-76.

"I wasn't simply trying to evaluate the extent of the problem," Melosi said. "I was trying to examine the relatively mundane problem of pollution and how Americans respond to it."

In early years, Americans did not recognize how and why garbage was generated, he said, but in the period between 1880-1920, they started to understand that it was a threat and a

problem. "Although the subject is mundane, the questions it raises are not," Melosi said. Refuse, he said, raised several uncomfortable questions about health, aesthetics, affluence, technology and the quality of urban life.

In the 19th century, the responsibility for waste disposal was not defined, he said, and this stimulated debate over the extent and limits of individual vs. community responsibility.

Increasing consumption, material commitment and affluence tend to be factors in the problem of waste generation, Melosi said. Today, the volume of waste continues to rise and thus, he said, the problem becomes more complex.

The largest volume of waste is paper, while the volume of household waste is relatively small, Melosi said. Mining and industrial waste present a more immediate problem, he said.

As times change, the types of waste change and approaches

also have to change to meet the type of waste, he said.

Technology, he said, does not always solve the problem. When the automobile was invented, Americans thought of it as the "salvation of the street cleaner," Melosi said, but instead it produced a different type of waste.

Melosi said he thinks recycling is important, but the problem is trying to induce people to do it.

"The clean-up campaigns are very temporary, and there isn't a very strong awareness (of them)," he said of the Texas

A&M campus. Although garbage on campus does not tend to be a great problem, there may be other types of waste, such as food waste, that are not as obvious to students, he said.

Although Melosi said he was prepared for all the ribbing he received when he wrote his book, he was not prepared for the enthusiastic response and the intense interest by public officials and organizations. He also said he did not expect the controversy that his book generated.

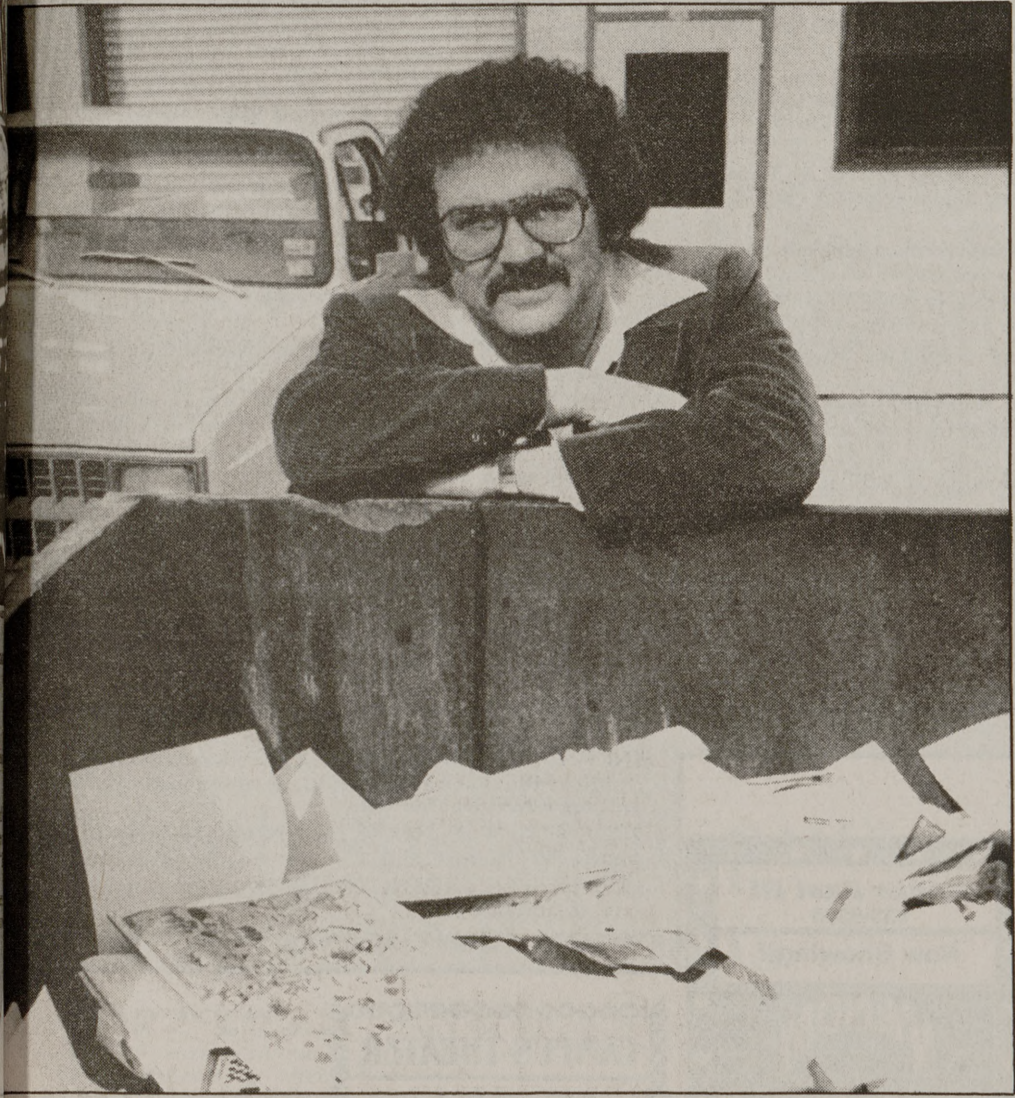


photo by Athena Vourvoulis

Martin Melosi, associate professor of history at Texas A&M University, poses behind his latest book topic — garbage. Melosi's book examines the history of garbage.

## Trinity Bay nears clean-up after 110-barrel crude spill

HOUSTON — Trinity Bay was much cleaner Sunday night as workers neared the end of cleaning a 110-barrel oil spill, a spokesman at the site along the Houston Ship Channel said.

Using skimmers, vacuum trucks, absorbent pads and rolls, crew members had already spent four days on the clean-up operation.

The brown crude oil apparently seeped out of an unattended self-service tank on stilts in Trinity Bay when a thief failed to tighten a storage tank valve after stealing an estimated 1,400 barrels of crude oil, early

Thursday, said Walter Sanford, a spokesman for Sun Oil.

The oil seeped out of Trinity Bay near Chambers County,

and moved towards Morgan's Point at the base of the Houston Ship Channel, a Coast Guard spokesman said.

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