

The model t drove america to new heights history essay



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Since the late 1700's inventors in Europe have thrown around the idea of a motored vehicle. By the mid 1800's inventors had made attempts at electrical, combustion, and steam engines. By the 20th century it was unclear to the public which form of engine would begin the first automobiles. At the start, the electric car became the most popular model, but in the 1900s a battery for an electrical engine did not exist that would engender a high speed over an extensive distance. The steam powered automobile was found to be more useful and use produced into the 1920's. However, the cost to manufacture and maintain a steam engine was incomparably high compared to a gas engine. The combustion engine slowly took the lead and market following the 1920's, among the first American automobile manufacturers like Henry Ford and Ransom E. Olds began to build reliable combustion engines founding the status quo of combustion engines in the car industry for over a century (McCalley 12). Little did Henry Ford know that he would soon enough redefine the status quo of America through the invention of a single car called the Model T. The Model T was the first affordable, lightweight and well-built car in the United States. Being the original mass produced car through the innovative idea of an assembly line, the Model T not only prompted the expansion of the auto industry but also laid the foundation for America's nonexistent middle class and for the American automobile industry we know today.

Profitable automotive manufacturing started in France in 1890. It was not until the 1990's that the United States began to produce cars commercially. In the early 1900's the European automotive business consisted of a multitude of diminutive sovereign companies that would produce only a

handful of cars a year by means of handcrafted parts and strict engineering. Early on in the United States' automotive industry there had been as many as 2, 000 firms producing one or more cars in a single year (McCalley 25). The first Model T's, built individually, in 1908 sold for about \$800, which was too much for the average American. Ford understood this and instead of creating the cars one by one invented the moving assembly line. An assembly line permitted an employee to complete a duty then watch as the car moved on to the next employee who would complete the next task. This allowed workers to be good at one specific skill and focus on that on every car that passed through the line. The United States automotive industry soon followed implementing assembly line operations across the nation, causing the supply of some companies to shoot up and causing other companies to be choked out. The convenience of the automobile freed people from the need to live near rail lines or stations; they could choose locations almost anywhere in an urban area, as long as roads were available to connect them to other places. Ford Company manufactured over " 1, 700 cars during its first full year of business" (Brancheau 1). By 1920, Ford found success in producing an economical Model T for the average American, selling over a million Model T's. While there were 2, 000 firms in 1900 " by 1920 the number of firms had decreased to about 100 and by 1929 to 44" (Brancheau 1).

At the turn of the century the automobile had one use in the transportation market and that was a toy only available to the wealthy. However, the general population began to request the new transportation method because car owners had the liberty to travel at any time they wanted and to any

place they desired. As a result, in Europe and North America the automobile became more affordable and more accessible to the general population. This was made possible by Henry Ford who did two significant things. First the Model T was priced as affordable as Ford could make it and second, he increased the Model T market by paying Ford workers enough to be able to buy the Model T's they were producing.

In slaughterhouses and for simple goods like tin cans, the assembly-line concept had been used but had never been attempted with a product as complex as a car. Implementing an assembly line in Ford's manufacturing factory allowed them to lower variable costs so much that the Model T's price could be slashed to as little as \$260. At \$260 a car a new middle class market could be penetrated for the first time in automobile history (Wik 138). " If there's anything about Henry Ford that we could call genius, it was that he could imagine millions of people buying his automobile and driving it," says Charles Hyde, an automotive historian at Wayne State University in Detroit (Davey 1). In reporting on a 1910 auto show in New York, The New York Times noted a 50 percent increase in sales of the Model T from a year earlier (Davey 1). " The transportation problem is gradually being simplified by the practical use of the motor vehicle" (Davey 1)

The Model T also prompted the expansion of America's middle class during the 1900's. Due to the monotony of assembly line labor, Ford found it difficult to maintain personnel. In hopes of increasing motivation for employees to stay working for Ford, wages were boosted wages to at least \$5 a day (Wik 140). This increase was drastically higher than what the employees of other manufacturing plants were making in the early 1900's. <https://assignbuster.com/the-model-t-drove-america-to-new-heights-history-essay/>

Paying the Ford assembly line workers a higher wage caused the American middle class to slowly expand, as the expectations for wage rates raised.

Sales of the automobiles in the United States have consistently shifted with the current state of the economy, “growing during the boom period after World War I and dropping abruptly during the Great Depression, when unemployment was high” (Brancheau 1). During World War II there were a large amount of jobs because so of the large amount of soldiers deployed and a scarce amount of cars due to reduced production, this caused a boom in mass transportation. Following the war, however, mainly in the United States and Western Europe, the automobile industry began to boom. During the war, automobile companies built tanks or other weapons for the U. S. army and employed large work forces, causing the production of automobile fuel, motors, and other parts to be in short supply. Following the conclusion of the war there was an unsatisfied demand of automobiles and a large amount of factories founded by the war. Many citizens had saved large sums of money because beyond necessities there was very little to spend money on during World War II. Consumers relied “heavily on mass transportation during the war and longed for the freedom and flexibility of the automobile” (Brancheau 1).

It was stated by a historian later on that “Henry Ford freed common people from the limitations of their geography” (Automotive 1). The automobile brought mobility to a scale never identified before, and the overall effect on society was endless. Prior to the automobile, in the days of horse-drawn transportation, the realistic limit of a day’s travel was no more than 10 to 15 miles (McCalley 53). Due to the limit of a single day travel, any neighborhood

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or individual property over 15 miles away from a railroad, a city, or a waterway was cut off from the majority of social and economic life around them. Motor vehicles paved the way to narrow the gap between urban and rural communities. Urban farmers ship their goods economically and easily by automobile, as they can drive to town when it is convenient. In addition, “such institutions as regional schools and hospitals are now accessible by bus and car” (Brancheau 1).

However, the effect on urban society has been more prominent than the effect on the rural society. By accelerating the outer growth of population into suburbs, the automobile has drastically altered city life. The suburban trend is stressed by the verity that highway transportation promotes businesses to relocate to a more urban setting where land is cheaper, access by car and truck is easier, and where enough space is available for individual companies to have their own one or two story building. As time progressed this motivation increased as better roads became constructed, further escalating travel throughout the United States.

Prior to the invention of the automobile, people both lived in the city and worked in the city, or lived in the country and worked on a farm. Since the invention of the automobile, the suburbs have exploded as they allowed citizens to reside on the outskirts of the city and be able to work in the city by commuting. New jobs were created such as auto shops, fast food, gas stations, and auto repair shops, allowing more employment for the United States booming population following World War II.

Henry Ford redefined American society through the invention of a single car called the Model T. The Model T was the very first affordable lightweight and well-built car in the United States. Being the original mass produced car through the innovative idea of an assembly line, it not only prompted the expansion of the auto industry, but also laid the foundation for America's nonexistent middle class and for the American automobile industry we know today.