

Automobiles and the environment

[Environment](#), [Ecology](#)



In his book *Restless Nation: Starting Over in America*, James Jasper (2002) explores the comfort Americans derive from the auto industry and its consequential effects to the environment. Jasper (2002) argues that one of the main reasons why Americans are restless and move more than any other people in the world is the presence of automobiles and cheap gas in the country.

Since the starting of the auto industry in the beginning of the 20th century, automobiles have been surrounded with controversy and conspiracy. It has been argued that unethical practices and conspiracy between oil and automobile industry has brought the world to an environmental mess in a less than one century but it will take more than one century to reverse the trend.

Since their invention, automobiles have had various negative impacts to the environment. With little consideration of the way you perceive the relationship between the environment and automobiles, there are negative aspects right from the manufacturing process to the end mess which is piled in the junkyards.

Whether in terms of energy usage, air pollution, water pollution, there is an obvious negative impact to the environment. Referring to statistics, it is evident that automobiles have had greater negative impact to United States and other countries around the world.

More than two thirds of Americans are overweight or obese and one aspect contributing to this trend is reduced physical exercise and increased use of automobiles. U. S consumers account for more than 25% of the world's energy production while it produces only 10% of world energy which means

cars and light trucks contribute to higher energy consumption. Automobiles therefore consume resources and emit pollution affecting our health. All the way from manufacturing process to the end of life cycle of that car, automobiles affect the environment in various ways.

Research Question

The following will be the research questions that will guide the study:

1. Historically, how have automobiles affected our culture?
2. In which ways, has automobiles affected the environment?
3. What can be done to reverse the trend?

Driving Our Way to Pollution

In his book, James Jasper (2002) exposes the impact of automobile on lives of Americans. On average, Americans drive more than any other people in the world, thanks to presence of cheap car, cheap gas, and capitalism. He asserts that automobile is not just an asset in the modern life but it is a part of emerging world culture. Time has elapsed when owning an automobile was a preserve for the rich and today, it has become a basic necessity (McCarthy, 2007).

At the peak of growth of the industry in 1920s, Henry Ford embarked on a major campaign to popularize the use of motor vehicles (Melosi, 2000). His invention of Fordism production system led to mass production of cars enabling the middle class Americans to own cars. The automobile culture grew rapidly and even today, it has become difficult to change this culture (Eban, 2001). From environmental perspective, this was however an enigma of auto mobility, a paradox difficult to solve.

For a long time in the history of the industry, the relationship of automakers and their customers was not suspicious (Melosi, 2000). However, the second half of the twentieth century came with oil crisis and for once in the course of the century, people realized that gas can be costly and fuel efficient cars were important compared to gas guzzlers.

At the same time, American government realized the importance of having legislations which regulated consumption of energy in the country (McCarthy, 2007). The Clean Energy Act of 1971 came with devastating effects on American automakers as consumer preferred environmental friendly cars. This culminated in other acts like in California where all cars were required to have zero emission.

However, industrial conspiracy between automakers and oil industry orchestrated destruction of several electric cars, killing the dream of environment friendly cars (Melosi, 2000). More than ever, environment effects of automobiles are evident to everyone from our polluted cities to junkyard full of old automobiles. However, the world has continued to drive its way to pollution and perhaps eventual extinction of life on earth if not urgent measures are taken.

What do we mean by driving our way to environmental pollution? To understand this question well, it is important to review environmental effects of automobiles right from manufacturing process of their end of life cycle.