



Objectives:

Students will gain an understanding of the history of the automobile industry in the 1910's, including methods of production, popular design materials, economic influences, political policies, and the cultural and social impact on American society.

Students will be able to answer critical thinking questions about the automobile industry and its impact on the decade.

Illinois State Social Studies Standards:

SS.6-8.H.1.Mc: Evaluate the significance of historical events to multiple groups and the relationship to modern day movements and events.

SS.9-12.H.1: Evaluate the context of time and place as well as structural factors that influence historical developments.

SS.9-12.H.2: Analyze change and continuity across historical eras and identify what perspectives have typically influenced how historical eras are constructed.

SS.9-12.H.4: Analyze how people and institutions have interacted with environmental, scientific, technological, and societal challenges.

The Automobile Revolution of the 1910s

The 1910s marked a pivotal decade in the evolution of the automobile, characterized by significant advancements in production methods, the popularization of various makes and models, and a profound impact on society, culture, and the economy. This article explores these facets, examining how the automobile shaped the landscape of the 1910s.

Methods of Production

The introduction of the assembly line by Henry Ford in 1913 revolutionized automobile manufacturing. Although Ford was not the first to employ assembly-line techniques, he perfected it to a degree that drastically increased production efficiency. The Model T, which



began production in 1908, became the epitome of this new manufacturing paradigm. By 1914, Ford was producing over 300,000 Model Ts a year (Noble, 2020).

This mass production method significantly lowered costs, making automobiles accessible to a broader segment of the population. The price of

the Model T dropped from around \$850 in 1908 to less than \$300 by 1925 (Gordon, 2021). Other manufacturers, including General Motors and Chrysler, adopted similar methods, further intensifying competition within the industry.



Above: Ford assembly line, 1913

Popular Materials

The automobiles of the 1910s utilized several key materials. Steel became the predominant material for frames and bodies due to its strength and durability. Wood was still used in some models, particularly in wheels and chassis, but its use began to decline. The era also saw increased use of rubber for tires, which improved handling and ride quality. The introduction of safety glass and advancements in paint technology contributed to a more reliable and visually appealing product (Duffy, 2019).

Popular Makes and Models

During the 1910s, several makes and models gained prominence. Ford's Model T was undoubtedly the most popular vehicle, heralded as "the car for the masses." Other notable manufacturers included:

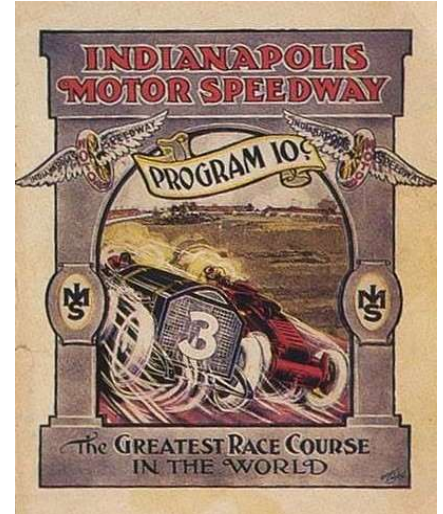




- **Chevrolet:** Founded in 1911, it quickly became a rival to Ford, introducing models like the Chevrolet Series 490 in 1915.
- **Dodge Brothers:** Established in 1914, their cars became known for their robust construction and performance.
- **Buick:** A leader in the luxury market, Buick's models catered to wealthier customers seeking style and comfort.

Racing also played a significant role in shaping the automotive landscape, with events such as the Indianapolis 500, first held in 1911, garnering widespread attention and fostering innovations in performance (Miller, 2022).

Right: The winner of the first Indy 500 race, Ray Harroun (top), A program for the first Indy 500 race, 1911 (bottom)



Economics of the Automobile Industry

The 1910s witnessed substantial growth in the automobile industry, contributing to a broader economic transformation in the United States. The automotive sector became a critical driver of economic expansion, creating jobs not only in manufacturing but also in related industries such as rubber, steel, and glass production.

The post-World War I period saw a brief recession, but the automobile industry rebounded swiftly as soldiers returned home, eager for personal mobility. By the end of the decade, the U.S. had approximately 9 million registered automobiles, compared to just over 1 million in 1910 (Gordon, 2021).

Cultural and Social Impact

The rise of the automobile fundamentally transformed American society in the 1910s. It altered not just personal mobility but also the very fabric of daily life. With the ability to travel greater distances, families began taking vacations and exploring the countryside, leading to the

development of roads, motels, and recreational areas. This increased mobility helped shape the culture of the 1920s, laying the groundwork for the modern American lifestyle.



Above: Campaign materials in favor of the Good Roads Movement,

The automobile also had political implications, as it became a symbol of freedom and individualism. The demand for better roads and infrastructure led to the establishment of the Good Roads Movement, advocating for improved highways and paving the way for federal involvement in road construction (Hagley, 2020).

Conclusion

The 1910s were a transformative decade for the automobile industry, marked by advancements in production methods, the introduction of popular models, and a significant cultural shift towards personal mobility. The impact of the automobile extended far beyond transportation, influencing the economy, society, and the political landscape. As the world moved toward the 1920s, the foundation laid during this decade would continue to resonate, driving further innovations and changes in the automotive landscape.

References

- Duffy, M. (2019). *Automobile History: The Role of Materials and Manufacturing*. Automotive History Review.
- Gordon, S. (2021). *The Model T: A Social History*. Journal of American History.
- Hagley, M. (2020). *Good Roads and the Automobile in America: A Historical Perspective*. Transport Studies Quarterly.
- Miller, R. (2022). *The Indianapolis 500: A Century of Racing*. Sports and Society Journal.
- Noble, D. (2020). *Ford's Assembly Line: The Birth of Mass Production*. Industrial History Review.



Other Historical Highlights

Between 1910 and 1919, the United States underwent transformative events that shaped its history. In April 1912, the Titanic sank on its maiden voyage, highlighting the era's technological optimism and the need for improved safety regulations. In 1913, Woodrow Wilson became president, advocating for progressive reforms and leading the nation through a turbulent decade. The U.S. entered World War I in 1917, with wartime propaganda, including James Montgomery Flagg's iconic "I Want You" Uncle Sam poster, galvanizing public support for the war effort. During this period, women intensified their fight for suffrage, culminating in the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Meanwhile, figures like Charlie Chaplin became cultural icons, using film to entertain and comment on social issues, reflecting the changing landscape of American society.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What role did racing events like the Indianapolis 500 play in the development of automobiles during the 1910s? How did these events influence car design and technology, as well as American culture?
2. How were manufacturing materials changing during the 1910s, as opposed to what was used a decade earlier? How did these changes improve the quality and safety of cars?
3. The automobile industry saw rapid growth in the 1910s, but it also created competition among different manufacturers. How did the rise of brands like Chevrolet, Dodge, and Buick challenge Ford's dominance in the market, and what does this tell us about the changing dynamics of consumer choice and competition in the early 20th century?
4. Why was the Model T so important in the 1910s, and what made it different from other cars of the time? How did it shape the future of the automobile industry?
5. What impact did the "Good Roads Movement" have on the development of infrastructure in the U.S. during the 1910s, and how did it affect the growth of the automobile industry?



Bring this lesson to the museum!

Help students connect their learning to real-world contexts by exploring these related vehicles on display at Klairmont Kollections:

- 1913 Buick M-31 Speedster
- 1914 Ford Model T Touring
- 1919 Sears Model A