

AMERICA AND THE AUTOMOBILE

This is a course designed to trace the impact of mass produced automobiles on American culture and the impact of American culture on the invention and production of automobiles. It will be a combination of cultural, economic and technological history.

We will begin with Henry Ford. A survey of the invention of automobiles (and their engines) will quickly lead to a look at the industrial and cultural factors that created the idea of the mass car (Model T). We will then look at how the Model T affected American life.

Next we will survey the growth of the American auto industry in the era before and during World War II. Here we will take a closer look at economic and social interactions between industry, advertising and people. We will also address the changes brought about by the Great Depression. The auto industry was fully involved in war production and we will explore this aspect also.

The majority of the course will cover the American Car Culture as it developed after World War II. We will follow the development of the size and power of the new cars (V-8s and Tailfins). We will explore the new cultures of suburban living and hot rods...the car culture of the 1950s. And we will look at the great changes that occur in the 1960s as performance and efficiency battle it out in the car industries of America.

Toward the end of this era, Europe and Japan begin to play an increasingly larger role in the development of the automobile. Their impact on the auto market in the United States will be another topic covered here.

The 1970s and 1980s see the wild swings between consumerism and commercialism that affect the American automobile industries and the American public. Compact cars, performance versus dependability and the "Japanese Invasion" all make this era important.

Finally we will look at the modern automobile. Its roots go back to all of the things we have studied so far, but the technological innovations of the last 30 years will be at the center of this part of the course.

This course will not just be a litany of model changes and engine development. We will be continually looking at how the car was a major character in how American culture developed since World War II.

Quick looks at topics like the evolution of luxury cars, drag racing, station wagons and the "drive in" craze will provide a significant part of the course material. We will view movies, read novels, and study the ever changing advertising campaigns for "this years new model".

We will also investigate how some of the great cars of the 1950s have been kept running in places like Cuba. What models are still there? How is the modern world going to affect them?