

READING 4-1: STEP BACK IN TIME: LIFE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE MODEL T

1900

Life before the Model T



**Detroit Publishing Company photogram,
LOOKING UP BROADWAY FROM DEWITT STREET,
NEW YORK CITY, 1900**

Imagine that cities are dirty and foul-smelling, and have many public health problems.

Living on a farm presents different challenges. Farm work is hard labor and lasts from sunup to sundown. Farms are isolated from one another so people living there don't have much contact with neighbors. Although some cities have paved roads, rural roads are rough and

It is 1900 and the United States is a nation of 45 states (Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii had not yet joined). The nation stretches for more than 3000 miles from coast to coast. The population is over 76 million people. A little over 60 percent of the population, or three out of five people, live in rural areas, but more and more are moving into the cities.

If you live in the city, you can probably get around on streetcars. For personal transportation, people rely on horses and buggies, horse-drawn carriages, bicycles, or their feet. With so many horse-drawn vehicles, people living in the densely populated cities are used to dealing with a big pollution problem – in one day, anywhere between 800,000 and 1.3 million pounds of manure may have been cleaned up from city streets in this country! You can



**Jenny Chandler Collection, Flushing, coming
up from meadow (with haystack), around 1900**

unpaved. Many farmers complain that it is difficult for them to get their goods to market because of the lack of good roads.

Automobiles have been invented, and several automobile manufacturers have sprung up in Detroit, Michigan, including one called the Detroit Automobile Company, founded by a man named Henry Ford. However, there are only about 2500



Detroit Automobile Company plant, Detroit, Michigan, about 1900

automobiles owned in the United States. People consider them a luxury of the rich. It's hard to imagine they'll ever catch on!

DID YOU KNOW...?

Henry Ford failed several times before finding success in the automobile industry. He started the Detroit Automobile Company in 1899, but that went bankrupt when all the investors pulled out. In 1901, he started the Henry Ford Company, but that also failed because of disagreements among investors. In 1903, shortly before his 40th birthday, Ford started the Ford Motor Company. And the rest is history!

1910

The Model T Has Arrived

The United States now has 46 states since Oklahoma joined the union in 1907. The population has grown to over 92 million people, due in large part to the nearly 9 million immigrants, mostly from southern and eastern Europe, who have arrived since the beginning of the century. Many people have come to the United States to work in urban industrial centers. Now, over 45 percent of the population is living in cities.



Model T chassis at Ford Motor Company plant, Highland Park, Michigan, about 1910

It is two years since the introduction of Model T. Henry Ford long dreamed of producing an automobile for the "great multitude," and the Model T made that dream come a reality. The Model T is a mass-produced commodity, made possible through the use of interchangeable parts and the division of labor. On January 1 of this year, Ford opened a huge plant in

Highland Park, Michigan, where he hopes to build Model Ts even cheaper and faster than he already does!

Because of his mass production techniques, Ford can sell the Model T at a low price: \$825 for the runabout and \$850 for the touring. That is a good price compared to previous automobiles. It's very good if you consider that the Model T is lighter and tougher than other cars, and it is higher up off the ground. Those features allow it to handle rough roads and make it up steep hills, offering freedom of movement like never before. That is not to say that the roads don't need work, especially in rural areas!



1910 Model T Advertisement

Owning a Model T is more affordable too, if you consider how cheap gas is after the Spindletop gusher of 1901 increased oil supplies. It also offers a solution to the problem of horse waste on city streets. Farmers like the Model T because it

allows them to get out of isolation, and they can find creative ways

to use their automobiles around the farm, relieving them of some of the labor of farm work. Largely because of the Model T, there are now 485,500 automobiles registered in the United States, more than anywhere else in the world. Still, many people manage to get around and do their work without an automobile, even if they are becoming more common.



Ford Model T with Family, 1910



Ford Model T race car stuck in mud during Transcontinental Race from New York to Seattle, Washington, 1909

DID YOU KNOW...?

In 1901, a crew who had been drilling for oil beneath the Spindletop salt dome near Beaumont, Texas, hit an oil gusher that rose more than 150 feet. By the end of the year, more than 17 million gallons of oil had been extracted. The new source of oil allowed the automobile industry to flourish in the United States.

1920: Life with the Model T

The United States is now a nation of 48 states. New Mexico and Arizona entered the union in 1912. There are over 106 million people. The United States has shifted from a rural nation to an urban one, with over half the population now living in the cities. Nearly 6 million immigrants have arrived since 1911, especially from southern and eastern European countries.

For seven years, we have been living with the moving assembly line, which Henry Ford introduced at his Highland Park Plant in 1913. Before the moving assembly line, a car stayed in one spot on the factory floor, and workers moved around working on a car until it was done. Now, conveyer belts bring the work to the workers, each of whom has a different job. The moving assembly line has revolutionized industry!



Model T engines on assembly line at Ford Motor Company plant, Highland Park, Michigan, about 1914

machine tools that even unskilled workers, many of whom are immigrants, could operate. Third, the moving assembly line uses a division of labor, which has each worker performing a different task on the assembly line, at a pace that is set by the conveyer belt. Because this work is tedious and difficult, in 1914, Ford introduced the “Five-Dollar Day,” which allowed employees, many of whom were unskilled, immigrant workers, to more than double their wages and cut their workday from nine to eight hours a day. Thousands of workers flocked to work for Ford and take advantage of these unheard of wages. As a result, the five-dollar day increased productivity even more – workers had greater incentives to work and Ford could always fill a place on the

The moving assembly line means Ford can produce Model Ts faster and in greater numbers than ever before. In fact, now more than half the cars in the whole world are Model Ts! Ford could develop the moving assembly line because of three main factors: First, the model T is standardized, meaning every one is basically the same. Second, Ford could use



Workers assembling Model T dashboards at Ford Motor Company plant, Highland Park, Michigan, about 1913

assembly line. Workers don't automatically make five dollars a day though; they have to meet standards both in the work place and at home to share in Ford's profits. Many workers are willing to make those changes because it allows them to live a middle-class lifestyle, including owning a Model T of their own!

People, especially those in the middle class, have a better chance of buying a Model T than ever before. That is because, thanks to the assembly line, the automobile is cheaper than ever before. By 1916 the Model T runabout dropped to \$345 and the touring car to \$360, which is well below the average annual salary, whether you work on a farm or in manufacturing. Now there are over 9 million automobiles owned in the United States!



Ford Model T automobiles in downtown Henderson, Texas, about 1920



Street Scene, Downtown Detroit, MI, ca 1918

With more people relying on automobiles or public transportation than horse-drawn vehicles, cities are much different than they once were. New roads are being built to accommodate the automobile and people are moving out of the cities and into suburbs because they can easily drive into the city for work.

Even though road improvements in rural areas have not kept up with those in urban areas, more and more farmers are relying on automobiles, especially the affordable Model T. The Model T helps ease the labor of farm work and allows farmers to transport their goods to market.

People aren't just using the Model T for work either. With the time that the automobile saves people, they can use their Model Ts for leisure activities and vacations—something that was unusual prior to the mass production of the Model T!

1930: Farewell to Model T

There are now over 123 million people in the United States, with 56 percent living in urban areas. It has been three years since Ford ceased production of the Model T, but between 1908 and 1927, over 15 million Model Ts were sold and the price dropped from to \$850 to \$290. Largely due Model T sales, by 1925 there were over 17 million



1896 Ford Quadricycle and 1927 Model T (15 Millionth Ford) at Ford Motor Company EEE Building, Dearborn, Michigan, May 1927

played no small part.

Automobiles are now the dominant form of transportation in the cities, and city structures need to be changed to accommodate them. City dwellers have recently seen new roads, parking lots and service stations changing the landscape. With the increase in personal automobility, activity is moving away from the city center. Where people once tried to solve problems of crime and



Ford Model T with 8,000 pounds of hay, 1921

automobiles owned in the United States! The United States is now in the midst of a major economic depression so many people can no longer afford to buy cars. Still, most people are choosing to keep cars they already owned. Despite widespread economic hardship, car culture has become a big part of American life. The United States has changed since you began your journey in 1900, and the Model T Ford has



1925 Pan-Am Gasoline Truck Delivering to Service Stations

poverty in the cities, they are now simply choosing to move out and into the suburbs. Businesses are moving out too, so if you live in the city and want to get to a high paying job, you might *need* a car. This is a problem if you cannot afford to buy a car because you don't have access to the same jobs as car owners. Without a good job, it's hard to buy a car!

Many farmers now see the automobile as a necessity. It is getting difficult to imagine

what farm work was like before the Model T became a farmer's favorite. With the help of automobile companies, farmers put pressure on the government to turn what was once a primitive road network into a system of concrete highways. With an improved road system, farmers can get their goods to market easier and cheaper, and that lowers the price for city people who want to buy farm goods.

Family life has changed too. Now housewives can easily escape the home and use their automobiles to go shopping for the things they need at home or for transporting their children. Teenagers can use the automobile to go out with their friends or out on dates, creating some new needs for negotiation between parents and children. Middle-class families are taking extended family vacations, traveling across the country to see cities they'd previously only heard about and enjoying the beauty of our national parks.



FREEDOM To own a Ford car is to be free to venture into new and untried places. It is to answer every challenge of Nature's drama, safely, surely and without fatigue. Where a narrow lane invites or a steep hill promises a surprise beyond, a Ford will take you there and back, in comfort, trouble-free. Of and away in this obedient, ever-ready car, women say, "re-charge the batteries" of tired bodies, newly inspired for the day's work. FORD MOTOR COMPANY, DETROIT, MICHIGAN

Ad No. F. M. 66. This "liberating" ad appeared in the October issues of Delineator, Designer, and Pictorial Review in 1924.

A lot of people depend on the automobile for their livelihoods, and love the convenience and freedom of movement it provides. Even though there are critics of the automobile and the changes it has helped create, it seems it is here to stay. The Model T and moving assembly line have helped create a car culture in the United States that no one could imagine at the turn of the century!



Detroit Publishing Company photograph, THREE SISTERS, TREES IN SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK. CALIFORNIA. 1922

HANDOUT 4-2:

CHANGE OVER TIME: HOW DID THE MODEL T AFFECT LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES?

Directions: For each of the years below, briefly describe what life was like in the United States before the introduction of the Model T (1900), during its years of production (1910 and 1920), and after its production ceased (1930). Use the categories on the left to organize the information.

	1900: Before the Model T	1910: The Model T Has Arrived	1920: Living with the Model T	1930: Farewell to the Model T
Cost of An Automobile				
Automobile Ownership				
Getting Around in Urban Areas				

	1900: Before the Model T	1910: The Model T Has Arrived	1920: Living with the Model T	1930: Farewell to the Model T
Living and Working in Urban Areas				
Getting Around in Rural Areas				
Living and Working in Rural Areas				
My Community				