



# I Invented the Modern Age: The Rise of Henry Ford

By Richard Snow

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## I Invented the Modern Age: The Rise of Henry Ford By Richard Snow

**From the acclaimed popular historian Richard Snow, who “writes with verve and a keen eye” (*The New York Times Book Review*), comes a fresh and entertaining account of Henry Ford and his invention of the Model T—the ugly, cranky, invincible machine that defined twentieth-century America.**

Every century or so, our republic has been remade by a new technology: 170 years ago the railroad changed Americans’ conception of space and time; in our era, the microprocessor revolutionized how humans communicate. But in the early twentieth century the agent of creative destruction was the gasoline engine, as put to work by an unknown and relentlessly industrious young man named Henry Ford. Born the same year as the battle of Gettysburg, Ford died two years after the atomic bombs fell, and his life personified the tremendous technological changes achieved in that span.

Growing up as a Michigan farm boy with a bone-deep loathing of farming, Ford intuitively saw the advantages of internal combustion. Resourceful and fearless, he built his first gasoline engine out of scavenged industrial scraps. It was the size of a sewing machine. From there, scene by scene, Richard Snow vividly shows Ford using his innate mechanical abilities, hard work, and radical imagination as he transformed American industry.

In many ways, of course, Ford’s story is well known; in many more ways, it is not. Richard Snow masterfully weaves together a fascinating narrative of Ford’s rise to fame through his greatest invention, the Model T. When Ford first unveiled this car, it took twelve and a half hours to build one. A little more than a decade later, it took exactly one minute. In making his car so quickly and so cheaply that his own workers could easily afford it, Ford created the cycle of consumerism that we still inhabit. Our country changed in a mere decade, and Ford became a national hero. But then he soured, and the benevolent side of his character went into an ever-deepening eclipse, even as the America he had remade evolved beyond all imagining into a global power capable of producing on a vast scale not only cars, but airplanes, ships, machinery, and an infinity of household devices.

A highly pleasurable read, filled with scenes and incidents from Ford's life, particularly during the intense phase of his secretive competition with other early car manufacturers, *I Invented the Modern Age* shows Richard Snow at the height of his powers as a popular historian and reclaims from history Henry Ford, the remarkable man who, indeed, invented the modern world as we know it.

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### Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Automobile mogul Henry Ford changed drastically during the years his Model T was produced. When in 1927 a funereal-looking Ford personally steered the 15 millionth T out of the factory, few remained of his associates who were present at the creation of the first T in 1908. Gone, too, was Ford's reputation as a progressive industrialist. Opinion about The People's Tycoon (title of Steven Watts' 2005 biography) had nose-dived, and many thought he was an anti-Semite, a woolly-headed pacifist, and an authoritarian businessman, whose iconic car appeared antique-like compared to the competition. To track Ford's metamorphosis, Snow agilely follows Ford's relationship with the mechanical love of his life. During Ford's years of tinkering, which culminated in the Model T, a gregarious, long-limbed Ford lopes through Snow's pages, but he hunches over in ensuing ones, rejecting proposals to change the T en route to becoming an egotistic crank. Snow displays excellent storytelling skill as, stiffening by the years, Ford's character develops through anecdotes and events in a lively narrative sequence that will engross readers curious about Ford and the Model T. --Gilbert Taylor

### Review

Snow "gets to the meat of a biographer's task— demonstrating how psychology and circumstances blend to create a life... Snow's supple and informative effort reminds us that although we've bought the automobiles and the assembly line, we continue to wrestle with the issues that concerned their creator." (Harper's)

"Highly readable." (Publishers Weekly)

"Richard Snow's lively biography will make you rethink the man whose legacy sits in your garage." (Parade)

"Snow displays excellent storytelling skill as, stiffening by the years, Ford's character develops through anecdotes and events in a lively narrative sequence that will engross readers." (Booklist)

"The 'T' itself is a protagonist in Mr. Snow's often lyrical book." (Wall Street Journal)

"Stylistically, Snow mimics the marvelously folksy, protean temperament of his subject, dwelling on Ford's early mechanical inventions rather than his latter problematic prickliness, and everywhere portraying a compelling character." (Kirkus)

"Richard Snow skilfully evokes everything from patenting battles to internal-combustion dramas — and his bullheaded subject, who set out to remake America, and succeeded." (Nature Magazine)

"*I Invented the Modern Age* is the amazing story of an amazing man, told with wit, insight, style, and zest. Richard Snow makes the invention of the automobile intelligible and fascinating even to car ignoramuses such as myself. His story of Ford the man is simply riveting. This is history as it should always be told." (Kevin Baker author of *Strivers Row*)

"Richard Snow presents a biography of a brilliant, difficult and strange man, a technological thriller about the most important machine he made, and a social history of the country it transformed. You live in the world Henry Ford made; here is how it happened. *I Invented the Modern Age* is clear, amusing, stern and

poignant." (Richard Brookhiser author of James Madison)

"No one has told the story of Henry Ford's incredible rise and achievements better than Richard Snow in this book." (Steve Forbes Forbes Magazine)

#### About the Author

Richard Snow was born in New York City and he graduated with a B.A. from Columbia College in 1970. He worked at *American Heritage* magazine for nearly four decades and was its editor-in-chief for seventeen years. He is the author of several books, among them two novels and a volume of poetry. Snow has served as a consultant for historical motion pictures—among them *Glory*—and has written for documentaries, including the Burns brothers' *Civil War*, and Ric Burns's award-winning PBS film *Coney Island*, whose screenplay he wrote. Most recently, he served as a consultant on Ken Burns's World War II series, *The War*.

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**Vanessa Gibson:**

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