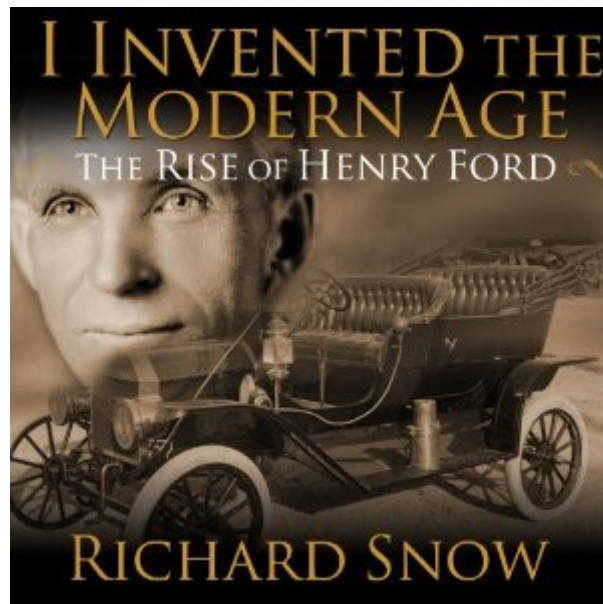


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I Invented The Modern Age: The Rise Of Henry Ford And The Most Important Car Ever Made



Synopsis

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 20th 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 12 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 listen, 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This wonderful book pulls Henry Ford into the present by presenting us with his deep revealing shadow. Richard Snow has chosen to create a picture of Ford that starts in his early life and leads ineluctably to the development of the Model T, which Snow describes convincingly as having invented the modern age. This isn't a new idea of course but what this book does is not only evoke a vivid picture of genius at its peak but it provides the essence of what we gained and lost through Ford's bizarre twists of character. We gained, of course, mass production and the automobile as a transformative force. And with Ford doubling the working man's salary, we also gained a middle class. (The book goes on to report on the brutality Ford later used against his workers, but that early support of the worker was an almost heartbreaking reminder of what is now being lost --US manufacturing and the working middle class.) And we probably also lost the possibility of a global organization right after WWI. The book doesn't shy away from Ford's very weird and destructive anti-Semitism, his ruthless treatment of men who had been indispensable in his rise, nor his damaging and tragic relationship with his son. However, throughout this brilliant book I was periodically reminded of two other men, Steve Jobs and Robert Moses, who were also initially motivated by the desire to change lives for good. All three achieved monstrous changes in the fabric of society by building tangible stuff and overcoming extreme obstacles to do so. In the process, however, all three also underwent crippling psychological changes that made them, somehow, monstrous. To make this point, the important biographers of Jobs and Moses wrote very long books. Snow elegantly and kindly reveals this in far fewer pages. And it reads like a novel.

One of the best books of recent release. Begin with a poor dirt farmer's son with a love for what makes things work but a hatred for farming, a creative genius second to none, the spirit of an entrepreneur par excellence, and ceaseless energy toward experimentation and perfection and you have the foundation for an interesting story. What must a writer have to make that backdrop interesting, pull a reader into that story, hold him or her and entice each one into wanting more and

more of what they are reading? First, Richard Snow had to possess a wordsmithing skill sufficient to bring together all the elements of a growing industrialization, a change in manufacturing techniques, the realities of a world political situation, and the marketing of a new phenomenon, the automobile. He hit a bull's eye on all counts. Secondly, Snow must have a working vocabulary and the language of a bygone period, be comfortable with principles of economy, social mores, and human nature of a time before most of his readers were even born. Then the difficulty of the task takes over and proves or disproves the skillset of the author, his mastery of syntax, his understanding of history, and his comprehension of politics, war, economics, and the human spirit; again right on the money. How does a writer weave an interesting work that ends up to be so fascinating, so interesting, so rewarding, that a reader comes away having learned valuable things, experienced true emotion, the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, the discomfort of error with the necessity of trial? Snow portrays a young Henry Ford, a person of honor, honesty, integrity, drive, tenacity, and brilliance in a storyline that is sure to capture and hold the reader for the entire span of the book.

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