

The Roaring Twenties**Biography**

Henry Ford

1863–1947



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Henry Ford was an innovative automobile manufacturer and founder of the Ford Motor Company.



As you read the biography below, think about how Henry Ford's contributions to the Ford Motor Company changed the course of history.

You have probably heard of Ford automobiles. Perhaps though, you do not know much about Henry Ford—the man who **revolutionized** personal transportation.

Henry Ford was born in Michigan, and at the age of 16, he became a machinist. Later, he worked at a Detroit electric company. Automobiles, a new invention at the time, caught Ford's interest. In 1893 Henry Ford built his first gasoline engine, and in 1896, his first automobile.

Henry Ford organized the Ford Motor Company in 1903. At the time, automobiles were expensive and the average American family could not afford one. For this reason Ford sought to create a sturdy and affordable car that families and working-class people could purchase.

Ford released the Model T in 1908. At \$850 it was still too expensive for many people, so Ford sought a way to cut costs. The company began using a moving assembly line method of production. This **innovation** allowed for automobiles to be assembled on a conveyor belt, with each worker or machine doing one particular task.

Moving assembly lines greatly reduced the time and expense of the production process. Each automobile, which used to take about 12.5 work hours to assemble, now was assembled in about



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VOCABULARY

revolutionize to change dramatically

innovation a new idea, method, or device

modify change

1.5 work hours. As a result, the price of a Model T was reduced to \$550 in 1913, and to \$290 by 1925. By offering the car in only one color and **modifying** it very little over time, Henry Ford was able to continue selling his Model T for a low price.

Henry Ford was also an innovative employer. He paid his workers above-average wages, provided an employee profit-sharing plan, and reduced the company workday from 9 to 8 hours. Not surprisingly, the Ford Motor Company became a popular employer. This popularity enabled the company to hire some of the most qualified and hardest workers in America.

Aside from automobiles, Ford also took an interest in political affairs. In 1915 he led a privately-sponsored expedition to Europe to seek peace during World War I. The group failed. In 1918 Ford ran as a Democrat for a Michigan Senate seat. He lost the election and did not seek public office again.

Henry Ford died in 1947. Upon his death, one of his grandsons, Henry Ford II, took over the company.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Recall** What innovation enabled the Ford Motor Company to lower the cost of its automobiles?

- 2. Critical Thinking** What was the advantage of selling Model Ts in only one color and changing them very little from year to year?

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Use a newspaper or an online resource to price a brand-new Ford automobile that is for sale today. On a separate sheet of paper, speculate on what factors cause automobiles to be more expensive today than in Henry Ford's time.