The Degradation of Work Revisited: Workers and Technology in the American Auto Industry, 1900-2000

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Annotated Bibliography

Since a vast and extensive literature on the American automobile industry exists, this bibliographic essay will provide a brief overview of the important books on the history of auto workers, their work, and their unions. The list includes important works on the origins of the industry and its workforce, the relations between auto workers and manufacturers, the racial and gender dynamics in the industry, some essential monographs and essay collections on auto workers, first-hand accounts of those who worked at the machines and on the lines, and studies on the auto industry's decline.


Jefferys, Ruth Milkman, Stephen Amberg, and Steven Tolliday and
Jonathan Zeitlin. The subjects include comparisons of American and
British production technology, automobile employers’ labor strategies,
technology and work, the unionization process at the Dodge Main
plant in Detroit, the post-World War II purge of women from the
automotive shop floor, automobile foremen, the collapse of
Studebaker-Packard, and shop-floor bargaining and job control.

Robert Asher and Ronald Edsforth, in *Autowork* (Albany: State
University of New York Press, 1995), have also compiled a collection
of their own and other essays that cover auto workers from the auto
industry’s origins through its reconfiguration as a result of the energy
crisis in the 1970s. In addition to the co-editors, the other authors
include Lindy Biggs, Kevin Boyle, Heather Anne Thompson, Craig A.
Zabala, and Steve Babson. The various topics comprise factory
design, the speed-up and worker grievances, patriotism and
autoworker wartime protest, the Ford speed-up strike and the postwar
social compact, automation, autoworker dissent in Detroit and
Lordstown, Ohio, shopfloor sabotage, and the contemporary
restructuring of work and the workplace.

Another edited collection, Haruhito Shiomi and Kazuo Wada's *Fordism
Transformed: The Development of Production Methods in the
Automobile Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995),
affords a global perspective on Fordist production techniques and
contains two important essays on the American experience. David
Hounshell's "Planning and Executing 'Automation' at Ford Motor
Company" describes the coming of automated manufacture in the
Ford Cleveland engine plant and Wayne A. Lewchuk's "Men and Mass
Production" offers a gendered analysis of management strategies in
the British and American factories. For a labor perspective on lean
production, see the various essays in Steve Babson’s edited
collection, *Lean Work: Empowerment and Exploitation in the Global

For African-American auto workers, two important books are August
Meier and Elliott Rudwick's *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), which explores the role
of black workers in the formation of the UAW, and Heather Thompson's
*Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*
(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), which examines Detroit's

Three influential works explore different aspects of the lives of female
auto workers. Although she writes about both women auto and
electrical workers, Ruth Milkman's *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of
Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of
Illinois Press, 1987) is a major work which details precisely why and
how "women's work" became women's work. Both Nancy Gabin, in
*Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women Workers and the United
and Pamela Sugiman, in *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of
Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-1979* (Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 1997), explore the institutional barriers faced by women
workers in the American and Canadian United Automobile Workers
Union.

A number of works analyze various facets of the social, economic, and
political history of automobile workers. In *Walter Reuther: The Most
Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995),
nelson Lichtenstein uses the influential UAW leader's life as the
biographical window into the social history of American automobile
workers. Sidney Fine's *Sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-
1937* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969) explores the
Flint strike so central to the formation of the UAW and the
transformation of American industrial relations. Henry Irving
Bernstein's *Turbulent Years: The History of the American Worker, 1833-41*
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971) also chronicles the years of


In recent years, a considerable literature has appeared on the critical challenges of the energy crisis, foreign competition, and deindustrialization to the American automobile industry. Emma Rothschild’s *Paradise Lost: The Decline of the Auto Industrial Age* (New York, 1974) is an important early work written at the time of the first oil crisis. Ruth Milkman’s *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) provides a sociological examination of General Motors workers in Linden, New Jersey, in the recent era of downsizing and deindustrialization.

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Details labor relations in the American automobile industry through a series of case studies. Womack, James P. *The Machine that Changed the World: Based on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology 5-million Dollar 5-year Study on the Future of the Automobile.* New York: Rawson Associates, 1990. You can learn significant events and facts in automobile history for 1900. This is an archived page. In recent years, the automotive industry has worked hand-in-hand with major technology companies in order to deliver the most advanced, safest and most comfortable vehicles out there. Cars are becoming large smart devices with advanced emergency braking capabilities, mapping technology for autonomous driving, better fuel efficiency and cars as a service as a form of transportation. There are no shortages of ways in which cars are improving the lives of drivers and other vehicles around them in terms of safety, getting from point A to point B with less of a hassle and entertaining us throughout... Here are four of the most groundbreaking technologies you can look forward to in the automotive industry in the near future.

1) More Fuel-Efficient Rides. Auto companies were laying off workers, and there were increased demands on the workers who remained employed. Amid these tensions, organizers created the United Auto Workers Union (UAW) in 1935. The union would play a major role in the auto industry from that time onward.

1940s: Auto Industry Changes During World War II. World War II helped the American economy emerge from the Great Depression, and prompted growth in the auto industry. According to 1940s.org, the government shut down all the major car factories in 1942 and converted existing stock for use by the armed services. Consumers coul