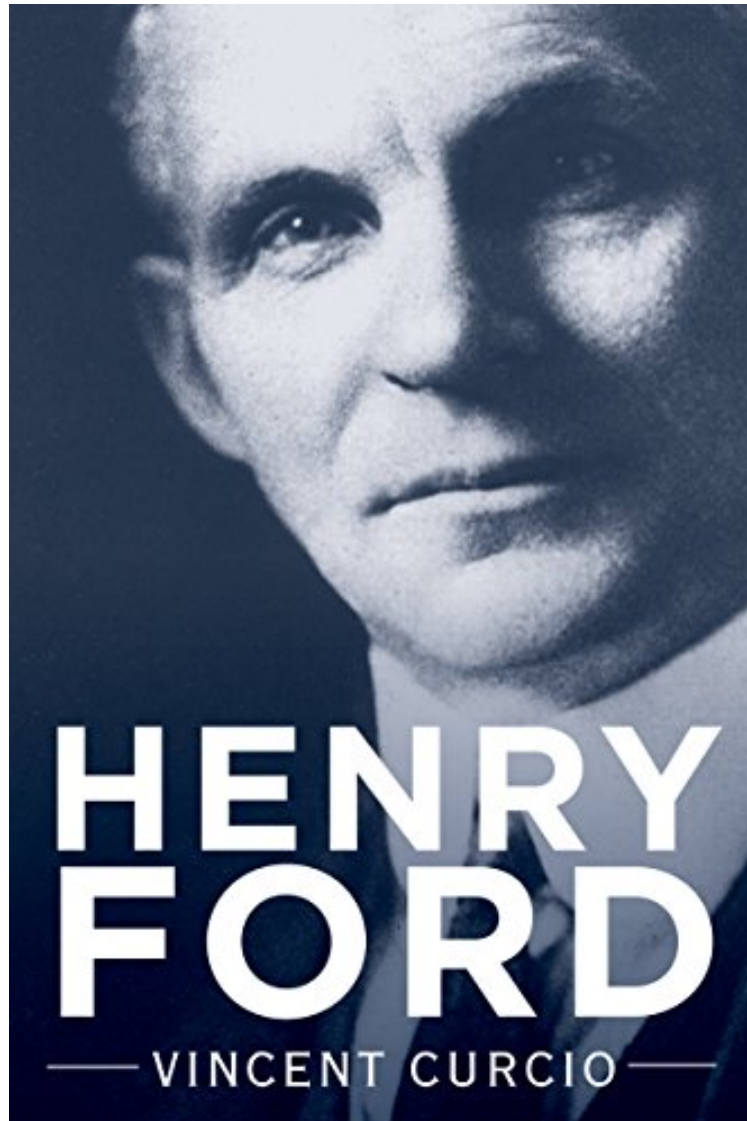


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Henry Ford (Lives and Legacies Series)

Vincent Curcio

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Vincent Curcio : Henry Ford (Lives and Legacies Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Henry Ford (Lives and Legacies Series):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A masterful work of concision
By John Reagan
There may be someone currently writing who knows as much about the history of the American automobile industry as Vincent Curcio, but if there is, I don't know who that person is. I've long been interested in this history, and as a result have read much about Ford. But I was not surprised when I read this new book to find that Curcio has distilled his vast knowledge into such a wonderful book. Curcio is more than a great biographer; he proved that with his extraordinary biography of Walter Chrysler. He's a great historian with a broad interest in the industrial revolution, and a particular

focus on American automobile history. His elegant discussion of a most inelegant subject, Ford's anti-Semitism, in itself makes this book worth buying. There may not be a definitive Ford biography, but if there is, it may be this brief biography. Curcio could easily have given us a thousand pages, and all would have been interesting, but he honed it to 274 pages and has given us a jewel of a book.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Much More Than an Industrial Titan By Joseph G. Wick Vincent Curcio is an experienced biographer who, incidentally, also wrote a biography of Walter Chrysler. So it is no surprise that this biography is as much a story of the automobile business as it is of Henry Ford. This book is extremely well researched and presents a picture of Ford touching both his virtues and vices. The extent of research is reflected in the acknowledgments, notes, and index which take up 30% of the book. Ford was a complex person whose importance is not much realized today. For instance, many think he invented automobiles. He did not. Others think him the quintessence of the capitalist. He was not. Some have heard that he was an untutored ignoramus. He was not. His name is generally connected with automobiles, yet his influence in America may have been much larger in the agricultural field. For instance, his efforts led to the immense growth of soybean production in America and his tractors greatly multiplied the productivity of the family farmer across the board. Rather, Ford changed the automobile industry in two major ways. First, he used "assembly line" methods and other techniques to continually improve manufacture. This allowed him to reduce the price of cars, unlike his competitors, to bring them into a broader market. Second, he was a progressive in terms of social conventions. He raised the pay of his workers to unheard of heights in the early twentieth century, much to the distress of his fellow industrialists. He hired the handicapped and Blacks when industry, generally, would not. The result was that for the first time, factory workers could afford the complex products they made. He set up unique training programs and provided "social services" to his workers almost before the government got into that business. In a sense he opened the doors for workers to enter the middle class. Thought to be almost illiterate, in fact he was an intense reader. Much of his "philosophy" was based on a study of Ralph Waldo Emerson. He had a large personal library whose books were heavily marked and marginally notated by him. In some ways he was a major cause of the modern manufacturing age, yet was most comfortable recreating the rural world of his youth. His thoughts on personal healthy living sound like something written recently, and he lived a long time. Not long after he started his company he ended up owning it 100% without slipping into the clutches of the bankers and Wall Street he despised. He was the richest man in America yet spent millions on social experiments and, ultimately, created one of the largest charitable foundations. He was mercurial and obsessively controlling, insistent on having everything done his way only, yet he could change his mind in an instant and go totally in a different direction. He was secretive and eccentric, yet admired by the masses to whom he preached a philosophy much more progressive than his fellow industrialists could accept. This book has some annoying qualities as well. For instance, the author belabors Ford's anti-Semitism far too much for a non-Jewish reader. The author seems to believe that in Ford's time anti-Semitism was mild and hardly known in America, except for Ford. One can only wonder, then, why FDR, a New York liberal, refused to take in even a single boat load of Jewish refugees. The answer, I think, is that he knew that the public did not want a substantial influx of Jewish refugees. Ford was definitely anti-Semitic, yet had 3,000 working for him and had many close Jewish friends. It appeared to be more a generalized personal feeling rather than an animus to individuals. However, for a period he was very outspoken in his feelings and beliefs, but that was not unusual for Ford. Yet he was even considered as a potential presidential candidate in the 1920s. Another annoying quality is that the book skips all around chronologically so that in even a single chapter you need to be alert whether the author is recounting something from 1908 or 1938. Moreover, in some respects the focus drifts from Ford to the automobile business in general too much for my taste. These annoyances should not keep you from the book. They merely indicate the importance of reading it closely. There are some factual inconsistencies, but Ford himself was a bundle of inconsistencies on the one hand and enduring consistencies on the other. All of these qualities, and more, are well laid out in this book. You will come away from this read with a much greater appreciation of Ford's impact on the twentieth century and our time, but still somewhat mystified as to what motivated the man and what was the real source of his philosophy of life and his genius. It makes you think.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Curcio utilized and projected the greatness of an uneducated yet determined man who was somewhat able to attract dynamos like himself. By James D. Pleiss Ford was an extremely private person, per Mr. Curcio, and only a few hundred pages about a giant in our midst! Mr. Curcio had four times as much to write and expound on concerning another giant, Walter P Chrysler; what little information about Ford that was available, Mr. Curcio utilized and projected the greatness of an uneducated yet determined man who was somewhat able to attract dynamos like himself, to his company and create an unprecedented automotive empire, but who, in the end, allowed a great city to crumble and all in it to suffer the harm of a banking collapse; and all because he detested the Detroit elite.

Most great figures in American history reveal great contradictions, and Henry Ford is no exception. He championed his workers, offering unprecedented wages, yet crushed their attempts to organize. Virulently anti-Semitic, he never employed fewer than 3,000 Jews. An outspoken pacifist, he made millions producing war materials. He urbanized the modern world, and then tried to drag it back into a romanticized rural past he'd helped to destroy. As the American auto

industry struggles to reinvent itself, Vincent Curcio's timely biography offers a wealth of new insight into the man who started it all. Henry Ford not only founded Ford Motor Company but institutionalized assembly line production and, some would argue, created the American middle class. By constantly improving his product and increasing sales, Ford was able to lower the price of the automobile until it became a universal commodity. He paid his workers so well that, for the first time in history, the people who manufactured a complex industrial product could own one. This was "Fordism"--social engineering on a vast scale. But, as Curcio displays, Ford's anti-Semitism would forever stain his reputation. Hitler admired him greatly, both for his anti-Semitism and his autocratic leadership, displaying Ford's picture in his bedroom and keeping a copy of Ford's *My Life and Work* by his bedside. Nevertheless, Ford's economic and social initiatives, as well as his deft handling of his public image, kept his popularity high among Americans. He offered good pay, good benefits, English language classes, and employment for those who struggled to find jobs--handicapped, African-American, and female workers. Such was his popularity that in 1923, the homespun, clean-living, xenophobic Henry Ford nearly won the Republican presidential nomination. This new volume in the *Lives and Legacies* series explores the full impact of Ford's indisputable greatness, the deep flaws that complicate his legacy, and what he means for our own time.

From Booklist This compact and easily digestible chronicle of Ford offers a conventional, chronological account based primarily on secondary sources. Curcio tracks Ford's life and accomplishments, beginning with his "moderately prosperous" childhood on a Michigan farm. Here Ford first revealed his fascination with machines and their practical application. As Curcio indicates, Ford didn't "invent" the modern automobile, but he was a brilliant innovator who understood how to get man and machines to work in tandem. He was also a social visionary whose efforts to provide high wages helped foster the expansion of the middle class to include industrial workers. This was, of course, enlightened self-interest, but Curcio also asserts that Ford acted out of genuine altruistic motives. Yet Ford was rigidly anti-union and employed violent thugs to quash organized efforts. Although he instituted color-blind hiring practices, he promoted a particularly virulent form of anti-Semitism. Curcio has provided a useful survey of the life of this enigmatic industrial titan that is ideal for general readers. --Jay Freeman "Curcio deftly conveys the intricacies of big auto business with direct prose, occasionally enriched by invocations of Shakespeare, ancient Greece, and Zen maxims." --Publishers Weekly "An in-depth review of the life of Henry Ford. Recommended for its insights into Ford's darker side." --Library Journal "A nuts-and-bolts biography of the great American visionary portrays a character of enormous contrasts." --Kirkus "Curcio has provided a useful survey of the life of this enigmatic industrial titan that is ideal for general readers." --Booklist About the Author Vincent Curcio is the author of *Suicide Blonde: The Life of Gloria Grahame*; *Chrysler: The Life and Times of an Automotive Genius*; and, with Steven Englund, *Charlie's Prep*. He was the General Manager and Producer of Lucille Lortel's White Barn Theater for 25 years.