**The Development of the Assembly Line- 1908**

Although Henry Ford did not invent the assembly line, he perfected the process in order to mass produce automobiles in 1908. Ford’s usage and perfection of the assembly line transformed American business and lifestyles in the early twentieth century. Before the assembly line, all products were handmade by craftsmen who saw the product from start to finish. These processes took many days and were very expensive. Henry Ford searched for a way to mass produce automobiles to ensure that the automobile was not a luxury item but an item that all American people could make use of and enjoy.

Early American fathers of the assembly line idea include entrepreneurs such as Oliver Evans and Eli Whitney. In the late eighteenth century, Evans owned a flour mill that used the basic parts and ideas of the assembly line such as steam engines and conveyor belts to move the grain through processing. Eli Whitney’s invented interchangeable parts in 1801 put many employees to work doing small jobs to fully develop a musket.[[1]](#footnote-1) In 1903, Henry Ford established the Ford Motor Company in hopes of making automobiles available to everyone. By 1908, Ford decided to divide tasks among employees and had each employee perform the exact same task over and over again. Before conveyor belts were installed in the factory, a chassis was pulled across the floor with towropes, and men walked next to the chassis individually adding parts to the automobile.[[2]](#footnote-2) This process cut production time by more than half, from 12 hours to 5 hours and 30 minutes. Once conveyor belts were installed in 1913, workers remained stationary, applying the same parts to the automobile repeatedly. With the conveyor belts, production time was slashed to only 90 minutes.[[3]](#footnote-3) Henry Ford’s Ford Motor Company was among the first to pay workers $5 per day, far more than the national average of $11 per week) and establish an eight hour work day.[[4]](#footnote-4) This labor reform leadership caused many other businesses to provide better wages and working conditions for employees.

Ford’s mass production of Model-T’s made them affordable for many Americans. In 1908, a Model-T cost around $850, and by 1927, they were only $290 each.[[5]](#footnote-5) Once a majority of Americans owned an automobile, travel became much easier, which caused a growth in many cities. This established a great demand for better road systems to make travel quicker and easier. Cars became a common item among families, rather than a luxury only owned by the rich. Furthermore, the near perfection of the assembly line caused many other industries to incorporate similar processes in order to mass produce items, make them cheaper, and make them available to more of the general public. Unfortunately, the development of the assembly line mechanized the production of many items; therefore, there was far less demand for human labor.

1. Kutler, Stanley I. *Dictionary of American History*. 3rd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Thomson Gale, 2003. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Faue, Elizabeth, and Gary B. Nash. *Encyclopedia of American History: The Emergence of Modern America 1900-1928*. Vol. 7. New York: Facts on File, 2003. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)