

Article Outline Example

Christopher W. Wells, "The Road to the Model T: Culture, Road Conditions, and Innovation at the Dawn of the American Motor Age." *Technology and Culture* 48, no. 3 (2007): 497–523.

Outlined by Zachary Schrag, 19 December 2014.

I. Introduction

Research question: Why did so many Americans buy Model T's, making them the center of the American automotive revolution?

Historiography: Many scholars, such as Rudi Volti, argue that the Model T "embodied few technological innovations, but was sturdy, reliable, and easy to drive by the standards of the time."

Thesis: In fact, the Model T's design created a new type of motor vehicle—the lightweight automobile—that transformed the U.S. market from one of disagreement and division into a broad mass market focused largely (if not exclusively) on a single technology. In doing so, it reconciled two seemingly irreconcilable worldviews, one forged in the world of the horse, and the other guided by enthusiasm for machines.

II. Competing Visions, Specialized Designs

Thesis: As horseless carriages appeared more frequently on U.S. streets, turn-of-the-century observers debated the role that such expensive new machines should play in everyday life.

A. Most early commentators on horseless carriages fell into one of two broad groups: the "horse-minded" who compared motor vehicles specifically to horses, and the "mobility-minded" who compared them to all other forms of transportation.

B. The fact that designers chose from three major motor types—steam, electric, and gasoline—underscores both the diversity and the uncertainties of early horseless-carriage design.

C. The declining importance of the market for commercial motor vehicles, such as urban trucks and taxis, and the rapid expansion of the market for private, recreational vehicles, helped cause manufacturers and consumers alike to develop an overwhelming preference for gasoline-powered vehicles.

III. Updating the Horseless Carriage, Americanizing the Automobile

Thesis: Despite its strengths, the adventure-machine thesis does not fully explain the development of automotive technology in the United States, where the split between mobility-minded and horse-minded buyers put the evolution of automotive technologies on a very different trajectory from the adventure-oriented path followed in Europe.

A. Europe, and particularly France and Germany, embraced gasoline carriages earlier and more fully than did the United States.

B. Like most cultural imports, however, the social meanings that the French attached to the automobile were subject to subtle change when translated into the American idiom.

C. Perhaps, however, the most important factor explaining why so many horse-minded consumers chose gasoline-powered runabouts and high-wheelers lies in an important factor that all manufacturers had to address: the poor state of U.S. roads.

D. Engineers thus began adapting Mercedes-style automobiles to U.S. conditions by raising the chassis to provide greater road clearance.

IV. Merging Worldviews in Ford's "Universal Car"

Thesis: To label the Model T "the Universal Car" was grandiose marketing hype and yet, as a description of the first automobile to appeal to horse- and mobility-minded consumers alike, it contained more than a little truth.

A. Although the prospect of an inexpensive, powerful, lightweight, full-sized automobile had wide appeal, automakers struggled to design such vehicles in the half-decade before 1908.

B. After much trial and error, Ford's team developed a design—dubbed the Model T when it went into production—that finally seemed to thwart the circular curse of weight and power.

V. Conclusion

The Model T's design allowed it to bridge the technological and social chasm that divided mobility- and horse-minded motorists—a signal accomplishment. Because of this fusion, the distinctions between horse- and mobility-minded motorists slowly began to blur and disappear.