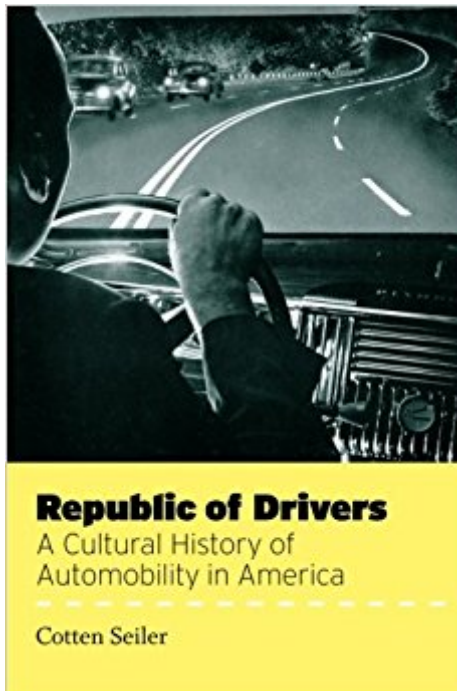




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# Republic Of Drivers: A Cultural History Of Automobility In America



## Synopsis

Rising gas prices, sprawl and congestion, global warming, even obesity—driving is a factor in many of the most contentious issues of our time. So how did we get here? How did automobile use become so vital to the identity of Americans? *Republic of Drivers* looks back at the period between 1895 and 1961—from the founding of the first automobile factory in America to the creation of the Interstate Highway System—to find out how driving evolved into a crucial symbol of freedom and agency. Cotten Seiler combs through a vast number of historical, social scientific, philosophical, and literary sources to illustrate the importance of driving to modern American conceptions of the self and the social and political order. He finds that as the figure of the driver blurred into the figure of the citizen, automobility became a powerful resource for women, African Americans, and others seeking entry into the public sphere. And yet, he argues, the individualistic but anonymous act of driving has also monopolized our thinking about freedom and democracy, discouraging the crafting of a more sustainable way of life. As our fantasies of the open road turn into fears of a looming energy crisis, Seiler shows us just how we ended up a republic of drivers—and where we might be headed.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This is history of the best sort. *Republic of Drivers* is brilliant, nuanced, and astonishing—the cross-disciplinary scope of this book is close to incredible. Despite the extraordinary reach of his research and thinking, Seiler wears his learning lightly and is sure to reach a wide audience.”

(James Livingston, Rutgers University) “Although it’s common to associate American culture

with the automobile, Cotten Seiler's inquiry into the relationship between the pleasures and practices of driving and the character of the modern American citizen-subject is consistently surprising. In addition to being lively, theoretically astute, and extraordinarily well documented, *Republic of Drivers* provides an utterly convincing account of the relationship between automobility, the economic, social, and cultural conditions that made it possible, and the visions of freedom and agency it promised twentieth-century Americans. This fascinating book should be read by anyone who has ever been captivated by the romance of the road trip or wondered about its significance for American history.

• (Janice A. Radway, Northwestern University) "Cotten Seiler's excellent cultural history of driving operates at the intersection of affect, identity formation, mobility, sovereignty, and the state, with wide-ranging and fascinating results. The best account I have seen of the cultural contradictions of the open road."

• (Eric Lott, University of Virginia) "Seiler brilliantly illuminates the phenomenon of 'automobility' as key to US society and culture from 1895 to 1961. . . . This is a landmark book." (Times Higher Education) "Written with grace and authority and finely wrought insight." (Julia Keller Chicago Tribune) "Seiler's argument is strong and elegant because it raises a point of wonder: how did a people, so rash and so blunt in many ways, manage to live out their desires in broad daylight to the extent that they did and still do?" (Andrew O'Hagan London Review of Books) "Republic of Drivers is likely to become compulsory reading for anyone researching automotive history and may well become a major text for American Studies students who are trained to think in interdisciplinary ways." (Margaret Walsh Reviews in History)

Cotten Seiler is associate professor of American studies at Dickinson College.

"Republic of Drivers", while intended for an academic audience, can be enjoyed by all. It is about how the automobile has touched our lives and how driving underscores basic values we Americans hold concerning independence, freedom, gender, race, and class. Fundamentally a book of history, it tells the story of how the automobile rose to occupy a place of importance not just as a means of transportation, but also as a means of expressing ourselves. If you wish to understand why Americans rejected railroad travel in favor of the automobile, this book can provide the answer. The inflexible schedule of trains, the impersonality, the inordinate speed--even for trains traversing beautiful places--the unsightly backyards and industrial wastelands displayed to passengers, the constant expectation of big tips from porters--all of these things worked in favor of travel by automobile. Fractures along class lines are also described in the book: how the auto was at first a plaything of the rich and how, with the Model-T, it became a possession of the workers. The topic of

women and automobiles is also explored: in the beginning high-class women regarded the auto as a way to display fashion; later it became associated with independence and freedom with links to the Suffragette movement; finally, auto advertising supplied images of women doing errands in the family car. "Republic of Drivers" will make a good read for anyone who cares about the history and sociology of our country. Though its language is at times dense and turgid, it is worth the few hours of study required to understand the main ideas. It should be in the libraries of all with an interest in United States history, automobile travel, and the sociology of the American people.

If you like dry history then this is a book you will likely enjoy. The reviews on the back cover are glowing in their praise of the contents but I found that the author made it more confusing than it needed to be. You have to pick it apart to find the meaning and reasons for the growth of the automobile culture that is not only prevalent in America but also in most of the western world. The same reasons for its rise in America can also be found in Great Britain, Germany, France, etc. I bought the book in the hopes of using it to explain to my Chinese students the causes of and the rise of Western Automobile Culture. Much of what the author writes about supports the reasons for the growth of automobile culture but then he tries to bring into the picture the growth of the Interstate System in America. The automobile culture was alive and growing before the Interstate System came into being. Throughout the book the author composes a sentence and then takes an entire paragraph to explain the sentence and in so doing seems to get lost in the explanation. Then as you continue to read it becomes obvious what he is saying or trying to say. In too many cases no explanation is needed; the explanation confuses the issue by trying to bring in too many additional issues that may or may not apply to the idea of automobility. In short, the primary reason for the rise of the automotive culture is here but you have to wade through a lot of extraneous information to find it. The author seemingly doesn't realize that the automobile culture in the west continues to flourish outside of the OEMs and is not only about the driving experience.

the shipment and packaging is good but the book itself sucks. Worst read ever. I got this for a paper I had to write in university and I could barely understand the idea the author was trying to make. Very boring as well, DO NOT READ THIS BOOK it will make u hate reading

The Republic of Drivers threads together things you know, and things you have wondered about, in a credible and insightful book about what driving means to us. As I read I kept finding a larger and interesting context for understanding our driving way of life. We all see how getting a driver's license

at 16 is the absolute center of one's world, and how giving up a driving license in old age is terribly difficult. What's behind the importance of driving? Seiler's common sense and scholarship make this a book you can trust. He tells us what happened as cars began to be for everyone, and how the choice to fund highway development through universal taxation shaped our culture and our country. (I confess, it had never occurred to me that there might have been other options.) The chapters on women drivers and African American drivers alone are intriguing enough to justify a careful read of this book. The story is told by an author who never patronizes and always engages. I also now have a perspective that I'm eager to use while watching what happens next in Detroit, and what is happening with automobility in China too.

had to get this book for school. Have not started reading it yet. Had to buy 10 books for the class. Good price!

Honesty, I wrote this book, wrote a term paper for it, and my opinion? The most boring book you'll ever read across life. I get the author's main point trying to use automobile as an metaphor in regards to the United States history. However, after reading this whole novel, I honestly think that his metaphor and the idea of automobiles relate to how united states and individualism....yeah.. I don't get the big picture? I honestly think this is the most boring book I'll ever read in my life.

If an author wants to write a history based novel, at least make it accessible to a broader audience. To read this you have to have a dictionary right next to you. Cotten Seiler comes off as pretentious in this despite having good points.

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