

The End of Detroit: How the Big Three Lost Their Grip on the American Car Market

by Micheline Maynard



About the Book

An in-depth, hard-hitting account of the mistakes, miscalculations and myopia that have doomed America's automobile industry.

In the 1990s, Detroit's Big Three automobile companies were riding high. The introduction of the minivan and the SUV had revitalized the industry, and it was widely believed that Detroit had miraculously overcome the threat of foreign imports and regained its ascendant position. As Micheline Maynard makes brilliantly clear in **The End Of Detroit**, however, the traditional American car industry was, in fact, headed for disaster. Maynard argues that by focusing on high-profit trucks and SUVs, the Big Three missed a golden opportunity to win back the American car-buyer. Foreign companies like Toyota and Honda solidified their dominance in family and economy cars, gained market share in high-margin luxury cars, and, in an ironic twist, soon stormed in with their own sophisticatedly engineered and marketed SUVs, pickups and minivans. Detroit, suffering from a "good enough" syndrome and wedded to ineffective marketing gimmicks like rebates and zero-percent financing, failed to give consumers what they really wanted --- reliability, the latest technology and good design at a reasonable cost. Drawing on a wide range of interviews with industry leaders, including Toyota's Fujio Cho, Nissan's Carlos Ghosn, Chrysler's Dieter Zetsche, BMW's Helmut Panke, and GM's Robert Lutz, as well as car designers, engineers, test drivers and owners, Maynard presents a stark picture of the culture of arrogance and insularity that led American car manufacturers astray. Maynard predicts that, by the end of the decade, one of the American car makers will no longer exist in its present form.

Discussion Guide

1. The title, "**The End Of Detroit**," refers to the end of Detroit's single-handed grip on the American car market. Do you agree that Detroit has lost its leadership?
2. What kind of car or truck do you own? Are you still loyal to Detroit? Or did you switch your loyalties? When did that happen, and why?
3. Did you or anyone in your family ever work in an automobile plant, at a dealership or for one of the auto companies? Have you been to a car factory? Share some of those experiences.
4. In talking about Toyota and Honda, **The End Of Detroit** says one of the things they share is a well-defined approach to designing, manufacturing and building cars. How is that different than the way Detroit approaches the development of its cars?

- 5. The End Of Detroit** talks about the rise of the new auto industry, in places like Kentucky, Tennessee and especially Alabama. What do you think about the fact that most of these are non-union plants? Does it matter to you? And do you consider the vehicles built in these plants to be American cars?
- 6.** One of the issues that the book explores is the rise of the Internet as a tool in researching and shopping for cars. How do you do your automotive research? Do you read car magazines, or talk to your friends? What difference does it make to have so much information available about automobiles today?
- 7.** Do you think it is important for auto companies to be offering environmentally friendly vehicles? Do you own a hybrid-electric car, or do you know anybody who does? How interested are you in buying one someday?
- 8.** The book predicts that Toyota will become the world's biggest car maker by the end of this decade, and that one of the Big Three companies will go away. Would that bother you? What does it say about the American car buyer that so many have stopped buying vehicles from Detroit?
- 9.** One of the recommendations that **The End Of Detroit** makes is that the auto companies get serious about real quality. How do you feel about the quality of vehicles made by Detroit companies, versus those from Japan and Europe?
- 10.** Finally, the book offers a five-point plan for fixing Detroit's problems. Do you agree with what the author chose? How do you think Detroit could fix its problems? Or can it?

Author Bio

Micheline Maynard is a reporter with the *New York Times*, based in Detroit, where she writes about the automobile industry and the airline industry. A seasoned journalist, her work has appeared in *Fortune magazine*, and she has been a staff writer with a number of publications including *USA TODAY*, *Newsday*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and the *Reuters News Service*. She began her career as a legislative correspondent for *United Press International* in Lansing, Mich., and she served as an intern in the White House Press Office during the Carter Administration.

Micki has been awarded three of journalism's most prestigious fellowships. In 2002, she was named a media fellow by the Japan Society of New York, which allowed her to spend three months in Japan conducting research for *THE END OF DETROIT*. In 1999-2000, she was a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan, where she began the work on the book. And in 1989-1990, she was chosen as a Knight-Bagehot Fellow in Business and Economics Journalism at Columbia University.

She is the author of two other books. *COLLISION COURSE: Inside the Battle for General Motors*, published in 1995, told the inside story of GM's financial collapse and the boardroom coup that brought it back to life. In 1998, her second book, *THE GLOBAL MANUFACTURING VANGUARD*, was published. It outlined the strategies used by the world's best manufacturing companies in expanding their operations beyond their home countries.

Micki is a lecturer on the Global Auto Industry at the University of Michigan business school, where she has taught MBA students about the challenges that the industry faces. And, she has written and performed in three cabaret productions.

Micki was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and grew up nearby. She is a graduate of Michigan State University. In her spare time, you will find her tending the perennial garden of her 1920 Sears Craftsman bungalow, practicing yoga, or indulging in her love of classic and contemporary film.

Critical Praise

"This is an intriguing if somewhat gloomy look at the American car business."

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