



# Autophobia: Love and Hate in the Automotive Age

*Brian Ladd*

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Cars are the scourge of civilization, responsible for everything from suburban sprawl and urban decay to environmental devastation and rampant climate change—not to mention our slavish dependence on foreign oil from dubious sources abroad. Add the astonishing price in human lives that we pay for our automobility—some thirty million people were killed in car accidents during the twentieth century—plus the countless number of hours we waste in gridlock traffic commuting to work, running errands, picking up our kids, and searching for parking, and one can't help but ask: Haven't we had enough already? After a century behind the wheel, could we be reaching the end of the automotive age?

From the Model T to the SUV, *Autophobia* reveals that our vexed relationship with the automobile is nothing new—in fact, debates over whether cars are forces of good or evil in our world have raged for over a century now, ever since the automobile was invented. According to Brian Ladd, this love and hate relationship we share with our cars is the defining quality of the automotive age. And *everyone* has an opinion about them, from the industry shills, oil barons, and radical libertarians who offer cars blithe paeans and deny their ill effects, to the technophobes, treehuggers, and killjoys who curse cars, ignoring the very real freedoms and benefits they provide us. Focusing in particular on our world's cities, and spanning settings as varied as belle époque Paris, Nazi Germany, postwar London, Los Angeles, New York, and the smoggy Shanghai of today, Ladd explores this love and hate relationship throughout, acknowledging adherents and detractors of the automobile alike.

Eisenhower, Hitler, Jan and Dean, J. G. Ballard, Ralph Nader, OPEC, and, of course, cars, all come into play in this wide-ranging but remarkably wry and pithy book. A dazzling display of erudition, *Autophobia* is cultural commentary at its most compelling, history at its most searching—and a surprising page-turner.

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