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Review: 'Storied Independent Automakers: Nash, Hudson, and American Motors'

John Alfred Heitmann

University of Dayton, jheitmann1@udayton.edu

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Charles K. Hyde. *Storied Independent Automakers: Nash, Hudson, and American Motors*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009. Pp. 307. Appendix. Index. Notes. Photographs. Tables. Cloth, \$34.95.

Nash, Hudson, and now even American Motors are automobile brands that have largely disappeared from the American memory. Yet, despite riding the twentieth-century economic roller coaster and operating in the shadow of the Big Three, these firms made sustained, significant technological and economic contributions. Charles K. Hyde's *Storied Independent Automakers* is the author's latest foray into the area of automotive business history, following work on the Chrysler Corporation and the Dodge brothers. A professor of History at Wayne State University, Hyde has written a needed critical business history on an important topic that complements the vast amount of "buff" and coffee-table literature produced on this subject. Indeed, the author has resurrected the rich history feebly represented by once-a-year orphan car shows that take place on a summer Saturday afternoon, reminding us of a once-textured automotive past.

Key individuals are at the heart of Hyde's story—Thomas B. Jeffrey, Charles W. Nash, George W. Mason, Roy D. Chapin, A. E. Barit, George W. Romney, and Roy Chapin, Jr., are the most significant persons. It was through their efforts and because of their foibles that these "outlier" firms waxed and waned from the pioneer days at the turn of the twentieth century to the energy crises of the 1970s. Hyde's prose flows effortlessly, and the book's readability is further enhanced by a chronological narrative that features lucid introductions and conclusions. In sum, although specific brands and models are frequently described, it is people—leaders as well as members of the rank and file—who drive this history.

In several cases, these leaders overcame humble origins and significant childhood challenges in their quest to climb the ladder of success. For example, as a child Charles Nash was indentured as a farm laborer, and George Romney was a member of a nomadic Mormon family. Yet Nash and Romney, along with the Chapins, both father and son, emerged as strong and visionary leaders who forged organizations that made an impact on an automobile industry dominated by General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. Above all, Nash, Hudson, and American Motors automobiles were often distinctive—the 1949 Nash Airflyte 600, the 1953 Nash Healey, the 1954 Nash Metropolitan, the 1948 step-down Hudson, and the 1951 Hudson Hornet are good examples. These automobiles, and many more, are pictured in this book. And along with

the images are numerous tables containing production statistics that chart the ups and downs of these companies over the years.

One theme that emerges in *Storied Independent Automakers* is that for these automobile companies, a great deal depended on leadership although there certainly were times when leadership was sorely challenged by external circumstances, including the Great Depression, war, and changing consumer preferences. Effective managers, like George Romney, recognized and seized opportunities. Flawed business strategies, as for example those adopted by A. E. Barit or Roy Abernathy, helped run companies into the ground and to the point of bankruptcy.

Perhaps the author could have included more cultural representations of these cars in his narrative. For example, Robert Johnson's "The Terraplane Blues" was one of the most significant songs linking automobiles and sexuality in twentieth-century American life. And I would have liked a bit more information about these brands' quality, and how quality issues, rather than design and market niche, acted to limit the growth of these organizations after World War II. But in conclusion, and despite my quibbles, this is an informative and useful book. I am confident that other readers will feel the same.

John A. Heitmann
University of Dayton

Patrick D. Jones. *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. 318. Bibliography. Index. Map. Notes. Photographs. Cloth, \$45.00.

This work contributes to recent scholarship that seeks to remove the civil rights movement from the confines of the South and place it in the urban North. Patrick Jones adds to this development by analyzing the struggle for civil rights in Milwaukee, one of the most segregated cities in the North, focusing on the years between 1958 and 1970.

Jones argues that the movement in Milwaukee developed in response to local conditions, which differentiated it from the movement in other locations. He begins by placing the African American community within the broader history of the city, which was defined by the cultural and religious practices of white ethnic populations. Due to the growth in industry during World War II, the African American population in Milwaukee increased exponentially, resulting in employment discrimination and strict residential segregation that