We may be witnessing the death of America's car culture.

And it's not dying of old age.

People are still buying lots of cars. But there's been a concerted push by government bureaucrats and environmentalists to transform car ownership from a source of pride to a source of guilt.

Ever since Henry Ford built the Model T, cars have been central to the American experience. That's because cars are more than just another way to get from point A to point B.

They allow us to go wherever we want, whenever we want, with whomever we want. Think about it: with trains, planes, and buses, the routes are planned and the schedule is timed. Only cars allow you to be spontaneous. When you get behind the wheel, you are in control. You are free.

The very reason people love cars – personal freedom -- is also why regulators can't stand them. Government – at all levels – craves control. And when it comes to your car, they want you off the road. So do the environmentalists with whom they have made common cause.

This antagonism toward America's car culture can be traced back to the 1970s. In response to the Arab Oil Embargo in the early part of that decade, Congress passed national fuel economy standards for cars and light trucks. These standards, known as CAFE (short for Corporate Average Fuel Economy), forced automakers to increase fuel efficiency.

Rather than let the free market decide what kind of cars customers wanted to buy, the government decided to do the dictating. Their regulations have cost car companies and consumers many billions of dollars. But in the last decade or so, the government's heavy hand has come down harder than ever.

Beginning in 2009, the Obama administration sought to dramatically increase CAFE requirements. These Obama-era standards make cars more expensive — around $4,000 per new vehicle, according to economists Salim Furth and David Kreutzer. This prices millions of middle-class families out of the new car market.

The regulations also encourage the production of smaller, lighter cars, that are generally less safe than larger, heavier ones. The laws of physics are tough to argue with!

To make matters worse, the new CAFE standards push automakers to produce more electric cars, a lose-lose for consumers and, ironically, the environment as well.

Consumers lose because, according to a study from the consulting firm Arthur D. Little, electric vehicles cost significantly more to operate over their lifetime than comparable gasoline-powered cars -- around $20,000 more. And the environment loses because electric vehicles produce three times as much toxic pollution as gas powered ones when you factor in the mining of rare earth minerals that electric car batteries require. And this doesn't include the environmental consequences involved in ultimately disposing of these batteries.

Adding insult to injury, a typical electric car gets fewer than 100 miles per charge and can take 4 to 8 hours to fully charge the battery. So much for the freedom of the open road. Maybe that explains why consumers have shown scant interest in these cars, despite hefty government subsidies and privileges.

Still the regulators, bureaucrats and environmentalists persist.

Urban planners are adding bike lanes, reducing parking spots, and pouring billions into more public transportation — all to get people out of their cars.

Former Boston Mayor Tom Menino once declared, "The car is no longer king" before banning all cars in a popular downtown shopping district. Arlington, Virginia, a suburb of DC, actually encourages people to adopt a "car-free diet" and live in one of the county's "urban villages." Seattle, meanwhile, plans to "aggressively" discourage driving by limiting parking spots, even though cars are "an unavoidable part of work and life for most people," according to the Seattle Times.

Time will tell if these regulations and strategies will work. Americans are explorers. We value our independence, and we've never been good at staying put, or being told where to go and at what time.

Maybe that's why, despite the government's best laid plans, sales of trucks and SUVs are breaking records as low gasoline prices inspire people to drive more and buy bigger vehicles.

Why shouldn't they?

Personal car ownership is part of America's fabric. It brings people together, and makes this big country of ours seem a little smaller... and more free.

America's car culture isn't dead...yet. So long as Americans still want to live in the Land of the Free, America's car culture will never die.

I'm Lauren Fix for Prager University.