In a world where oil is a necessity for basic daily function, *Who Killed the Electric Car* tries to address some of the issues regarding why the search for alternatives to cars that run on oil failed in the 1990s. The film takes this idea a step further revealing who exactly is to blame. This being said, it appears that the target audience appears to be the average American unaware of the destruction of the electric car and what effect this could potentially have on earth. It feels like the filmmakers want the viewers to walk away with the knowledge that the means to introduce alternatives for gas guzzling cars exist, but corporate America is just not ready to allow their existence.

The presentation of this documentary adds a lot to the overall meaning of the piece. It begins with an entertaining, fake funeral where past EV1 owners stand around an electric car talking about how much they loved the EV1 and how much promise it had. From this point, the film launches into a reasonably consistent interview model in which the producers list different “suspects” of the murderer of the electric car, then interview key personalities as they relate to these different suspects. The viewer is introduced to the suspects who include the consumers, car batteries, oil companies, government, California Air Resources Board, and Hydrogen fuel cell. All of these suspects have different people that essentially speak on their behalf, either incriminating them, or acquitting them.

These interviewees range from automotive experts, to reporters, to regular street pedestrians. Different interviewees appear to be intentionally put in a certain order for added emphasis. They are never actually “interviewed” in the sense of being asked questions on camera, however, they speak as if they were asked a question and then answer it in a normal fashion. This works, and makes for a compelling documentary; however, the transitioning is sometimes weak between the different suspects. Once all of the speakers for a given suspect are shown, the film basically jumps to the next suspect,
offering little closure on each section. One could surmise that the producers purposely did this in an attempt to give each suspect an equal and fair presentation.

When one takes all of the different suspects presented and puts the film into retrospect, there is definitely an argument being made by the director and producers. There seems to be a clear cut theory (conspiracy or otherwise) that the government, big time oil companies, and car companies were all working in unison to make sure that the electric car never became widely available or successful, despite widespread consumer interest in the car. The film does seem to provide an argument from both sides of the spectrum to be fair to the audience; however, an astute viewer can clearly see a much greater tilt towards the side against the three “criminals”. This is demonstrated through the sheer volume of interviewees that speak out against the downfall of the EV1 as compared to the interviewees that justify the destruction of the EV1. Further, the actual video footage shown in the film all points toward an attack on those who helped bring about the demise of the EV1.

While there are numerous scenes in Who Killed the Electric Car that evidence how the film is sympathetic towards the cause of saving the idea of the electric car, there is one specific that really drives this idea home. About a third of the way through the movie, (37 minute mark) the filmmaker is shown flying over a car crushing site where hundreds of EV1 cars that had been in perfectly good condition. Many owners of these cars wanted to keep them terribly, however, the car company forced them to give up the EV1 when the leases expired. The scene is very dramatic and emotional because the scenes prior showed all of these owners unbelievably happy and excited to have an EV1. We see the difference between these owners’s happiness and then their wave of sadness that washed over them upon seeing their cars crushed. The scene is highly effective because of the contrast that it draws as well as the way that it was shot. The slow flyby over the crushing site has a lot of colors that melt together and create a very dull, dreary effect. Further, some of the cars had text written on them, messages from their previous owners asking General Motors to not destroy the environmentally friendly cars. Clearly,
their attempts were unsuccessful and this scene, like many others in the movie, adds a great deal of substance to the film.

Overall, the techniques and strategy employed in this movie can teach a lot to other documentarians when considering this film’s overall effectiveness. Probably one of the most prominent features of the film is its unconventional introduction that is completely dramatized. The burial of the EV-1 is clearly fake due to the heavy tonal change and ridiculous nature of the scene as compared to the rest of the film. Nonetheless, this opening really draws the viewer in and allows the viewer to relate to what is going on. On a separate note, the interviewing technique in this movie that has the interviewee speaking without the viewer hearing what exactly the interviewee was asked allows the viewer to feel as if they are being directly spoken to. Because the narration and producer voice is kept to a minimum, this feeling is successfully maintained throughout most of the film. This in turn creates an awesome dynamic between the film and those who watch it. Who Killed the Electric Car is a documentary full wit, well versed information and presented in a format that is intriguing and understandable. It starts with a purpose to explain what happened to the electric car and how it came to its demise and it does so succinctly, artistically and successfully.