
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Edison: Impact of Technology on Society

TRANSCRIPT

Jill Jonnes, Writer: Put yourself back into this world where everything, everything to do with light was a flame, and imagine that, all of a sudden, one day that changes.

Nathan Myhrvold, Inventor and Entrepreneur: Any new invention, any really powerful idea is going to provoke awe and wonder, and a certain amount of anxiety. In the 19th century, technology was making radical changes.

Narrator: By the early 1880s, machines had begun to usher America into the modern world -- warping time in a way that just a generation before would have seemed unimaginable. The journey from New York to San Francisco, which once had taken months, now could be accomplished in a matter of days; and a news story written in Washington D.C. on Tuesday was printed in the Wednesday papers in cities thousands of miles away. In the office and the factory, as well as on the farm, machines made the task at hand quicker, even as electric light promised to prolong the day.

John Staudenmaier, Historian: Ordinary people feel like they are a part of a godlike force that is sweeping up a backward world and turning it into an immensely sophisticated, fast-moving, exciting place. I think at the same time it is scaring the hell out of those same people. They don't understand how things work anymore. Where is the world going?