



## [Great Inventions of the Gilded Age](#)

### **In A Nutshell**

Technological advances transformed America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the period known as the Gilded Age. Enterprising Americans built on the innovations of the first Industrial Revolution and the national networks of transportation and communication established by railroad track and telegraph line earlier in the century. They created new industries and tapped into a truly national market for manufactures and consumer goods. By 1900, the turn of the century and what historians refer to as the Second Industrial Revolution, American society was one of mass production, mass consumption, and mass marketing, and the nation was poised to assume the global lead in technology and industry. In short, the United States emerged from the final decades of the nineteenth century as an increasingly urban, heavily industrialized world power—the product of a technological transformation that profoundly altered American life and society in every respect.

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Railroad companies standardized time in 1883 and carved America into the four time zones still used to this day. Until then, local "sun" time had been used as people traveled from place to place, but the railroads needed a uniform clock to create consistent departure and arrival schedules. U.S. standard time immediately preceded the establishment of an international standard time agreement that took place the next year at the White House. There, in 1884, nineteen nations met and agreed to establish the prime meridian, or zero degree longitude by which all other longitudes are measured, at Greenwich, England. America's first telephone operators were boys and had a reputation for being rude, impatient, and profane—to each other and to customers. The young women who were brought in to replace them were not only more polite and less given to swearing, they were also supposedly faster. So began one of the first professions to bring women into the workplace in significant numbers.

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