

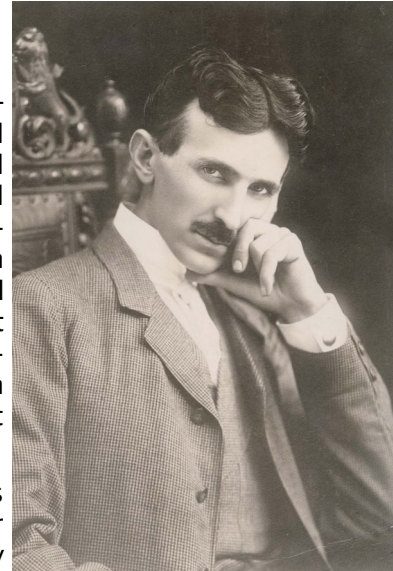
Living in the Past

Historical perspective



The inventor of radio

In 1888, the United States [was at war](#), but not the kind that resulted in many fatalities. Thomas Edison, famous inventor, and George Westinghouse, enterprising entrepreneur, were engaged in a bitter and large-scale battle to provide American homes and businesses with electric power. Edison, who pushed to have electrical energy delivered by DC (direct current), was at odds with Westinghouse's brilliant immigrant engineer, **Nikola Tesla** (and others), who maintained by calculation and demonstration that AC (alternating current) was the safer and more economically feasible electrical delivery method. Eventually, Edison retired from the power business, and the DC power distribution movement retired with him, ending the "current war" with Westinghouse.



Born 1856 to a Serbian priest and a genius mother in today's Croatia, Tesla grew up educated, and even graduated from a four-year high school program in three years. Tesla eventually dropped out of the university after two years there, at odds with a professor whom Nikola claimed didn't understand him. A Continental Edison employer in Paris who did believe in him gave Tesla a letter of recommendation, and sent him to America to work for Thomas Edison.

While under Edison's employ, Tesla designed an improved arc-lamp street light that Edison was never sold on, so Tesla quit and started [his own company](#). After its failure, investors impressed with Tesla funded his design of the first brushless *three-phase AC motor* that used a rotating magnetic field and was more powerful and efficient than DC motors. In 1891, Westinghouse eventually purchased Tesla's AC polyphase motor patents. Then, to help Tesla demonstrate the effectiveness of AC, he used Tesla's AC system to light the [Columbian Exposition](#) at Chicago (also known as the Chicago World's Fair) in 1893.

It was around then, that Tesla also developed a resonant transformer circuit, later called the [Tesla coil](#). Meanwhile, Nikola became obsessed with the prospect of wirelessly distributing electrical energy to distant receiving stations. He created an [experimental tower](#) to provide the distribution, powered by his famous coil, but it never really caught on, and the tower was eventually dismantled.

Around 1894, [Guglielmo Marconi](#) started reading about the works of [Heinrich Hertz](#) and Nikola Tesla working with radio waves. In 1898, Tesla even developed the first radio-controlled craft, a boat that he hoped the US Navy would purchase as a prototype for a guided torpedo. Yet, in 1901, Marconi received a [patent for radio](#), and was crowned the inventor of radio.

In January 1943, Nikola Tesla passed away, and numerous people, among whom were the most widely known dignitaries and scientists of that day, attended his funeral. It was June of that same year when the US Supreme Court finally declared Marconi's patent of the first radio invalid, making Nikola Tesla the true inventor of radio, contrary to [popular misconception](#). In 1960, at the General Conference on Weights and Measures, the SI derived unit for *magnetic flux density* (the [Tesla](#), symbol "T") was named in his honor.