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Tesla versus Edison

Quoted from the [Tesla Insanity Main Page](#)

The following is a short Tesla bio that I did for school with the topic of "People who have gone against the status quo." -- Thomas Samstag

Nikola Tesla The Forgotten Father of Today

One of the greatest minds of the 19th and 20th centuries, responsible for today's modern world, Nikola Tesla is still virtually unknown to today's textbooks, teachers, and general public. Thinking back to your high school years and looking through an encyclopedia, who do you remember as the inventor of radio? The name that probably comes to mind is Marconi. And if I asked the same about X-rays, you'd probably say Roentgen. And a vacuum tube amp, probably de Forest. While you're at it, who invented the florescent bulb, neon lights, speedometer, auto ignition system, and the basics behind radar, the electron microscope, and the microwave oven? Chances are you see little, if any, mentions of Tesla. Very few people today have ever even heard of him. The all-around nice guy Thomas Edison made sure of that.

Nikola Tesla was born in Smiljan, Croatia (now Yugoslavia) in 1858. Young Nikola had a great memory and spoke six languages. He spent four years at the Polytechnic Institute at Gratz studying math, physics, and mechanics. The amazing thing about him was that he had a great understanding of electricity (remember that this was at a time when electricity was still at infancy, the electric light bulb hadn't even been invented yet).

Tesla moved to the United States in 1884. When he arrived, he worked as an assistant to Thomas Edison, then in his late 30's. Edison had just invented the electric light bulb, but he needed a system to distribute electricity to houses. He designed a DC (direct current) system, but it had many bugs in it. Edison promised Tesla lots of money in bonuses if he could get the bugs out. Tesla took the challenge and ended up saving Edison over \$100,000, which was millions of dollars by today's standards. Edison later refused to keep his promise. Tesla quit not long after that, and Edison spent the rest of his life trying to discredit Tesla (which is the main reason why he is so unknown today).

In 1888, Tesla devised a better system of transmission, the AC (alternating current) system used in houses around the world today. By using Tesla's newly developed transformers, AC could be stepped up and transmitted over long distances through thin wires. Edison's DC couldn't be stepped up, required a large power plant every square mile and thick cables for transmission.

Electricity is useless if it can't do anything, so in 1890, Tesla invented a motor to run on AC, the same type of motor used in every household appliance today. Scientists of the late 1880's were convinced that no motor could work with AC. After all, AC electricity reverses itself 60 times a second, so all previous motors would just rock back and forth 60 times a second. Tesla solved this problem and proved them all wrong.

Word of AC eventually got to George Westinghouse. In 1893, Tesla signed a contract with Westinghouse to get \$2.50 per Kilowatt of AC sold. Nikola finally had the money to conduct all of the experiments that he had dreamt of.



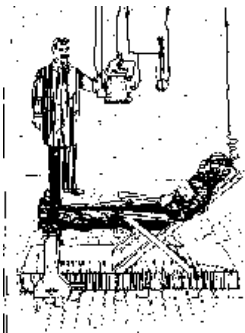
Tesla developed and used florescent bulbs in his lab some 40 years before industry "invented" them. At the World's Fair, Tesla took glass tubes and bent them into famous scientists' names- the first neon signs. Tesla also designed the world's first hydroelectric plant at Niagara Falls in 1895. Tesla also patented the first speedometer for cars in 1916. In fact, Tesla invented all of the things that are listed at the beginning of the paper.

But Edison soon had too much money invested into his DC system, and he tried his best to discredit Tesla by showing that AC was more dangerous than DC. Edison paid local children 25 cents for each stray dog they could bring him. Then he would hold press conferences and electrocute the dogs at public gatherings to frighten people. He claimed that DC could not kill, but in fact, it could. Below is a drawing from 1889 of a horse being electrocuted in Edison's Menlo Park Laboratory.



Edison felt that it was necessary to experiment by killing animals before he could guarantee his electric chair would kill efficiently.

Yes, it was actually Edison who invented the electric chair to frighten people away from Tesla's AC system, as shown in the below drawing from 1890.



But Tesla counteracted by staging his own marketing campaign. At the 1893 World Exposition in Chicago, attended by 21 million, Tesla demonstrated the safety of AC by passing high frequency AC through his body to power light bulbs. He was then able to shoot large lightning bolts into the crowd without harm.

When royalties owed to him by Westinghouse exceeded \$1 million, Westinghouse ran into financial trouble. Tesla realized that if he kept his contract, Westinghouse would go out of business, so Tesla took his contract and ripped it up! Instead of becoming the first billionaire, he got \$216,600 outright for his patents.

In 1898, Tesla demonstrated the first remote controlled model boat at Madison Square Garden.

After all of these technological breakthroughs, Tesla still had not achieved his lifelong dream. All Tesla's life, he had dreamt of free wireless energy and other signals to the world.

In 1900, Tesla was backed with \$150,000 from J. P. Morgan. Tesla began construction of "Wireless Broadcasting System" tower on Long Island, New York. Tesla intended to use it to link the world's telephone and telegraph and to transmit pictures, stock reports, and weather information.



When Morgan found out that it meant FREE energy, he cut Tesla's funding. There is still a lot of controversy to what happened to Tesla's original tower. One story says that the government tore it down during World War I for fear that the German U-boat spies would use the tower as landmark to navigate by. Another story says that Tesla ran into financial trouble and sold the tower for scrap to pay off creditors.

The world thought that Tesla was crazy. Transmission of voice and pictures was unheard of in that time. What they didn't know is that he had already demonstrated the principals behind radio nearly ten years before Marconi's supposed invention. In 1943, the year that Tesla died, the Supreme Court ruled that Marconi's patents invalid due to Tesla's previous descriptions, but yet most textbooks and encyclopedias credit Marconi.

The Press started to exaggerate Tesla's claims. Tesla reported that he received radio signals from Mars and Venus. Today we know that these were really signals from distant pulsing stars.

In his Manhattan lab, Tesla made Earth into an electric tuning fork. He made a steam driven oscillator vibrate at the frequency of the ground beneath him. The result was a small earthquake in the surrounding city blocks. It was here that he contended that in theory, he could do the same to even split the earth in two. He accurately determined the resonant frequency of Earth almost 60 years before science could confirm it.

In his Colorado Springs, Colorado lab, in 1899, Tesla made what he thought was his biggest discovery ever--terrestrial stationary waves. He sent waves of energy through Earth that bounced back to the source. When they came back, he added more electricity to it. He lighted 200 lamps without wires from a distance of 25 miles and created the biggest man-made lightning bolt ever, 130ft. long! That's a world record still unbroken. Strange electrical things happened near that lab. People would walk near the lab, and sparks would jump up from the ground to their feet. One boy took a screwdriver, held it near a fire hydrant, and drew a four inch electrical spark from the hydrant. Sometimes the grass around his lab would glow with an eerie blue corona, St. Elmo's Fire. What they didn't know was this was small stuff. The man in the lab was merely tuning up his apparatus. Unfortunately, he blew out some of the power plant's equipment and was never able to repeat his experiment.

At the beginning of World War I, the government desperately searched for a way to detect German submarines. The government put Thomas Edison in charge of the search for a good method. Tesla proposed the use of energy waves - what we know today as radar - to detect these ships. Edison rejected Tesla's idea as ludicrous and the world had to wait another 25 years until it was invented.

What was his reward for a lifetime of creativity? The prized (to everyone but Tesla) Edison Medal! A real slap in the face after all the verbal abuse Tesla took from Edison.

Lacking capital, he was forced to place his untested theories into countless notebooks.

The man who invented the modern world died nearly penniless at age 86 on January 7, 1943. More than two thousand people attended his funeral.

In his lifetime, Tesla received over 800 different patents. He probably would have exceeded Edison's record number if he wasn't always broke - he could afford very few patent applications during the last thirty years of his life.

Unlike Edison, Tesla was an original thinker whose ideas typically had no precedent in science. Unfortunately, the world does not financially reward people of Tesla's originality. We only award those that take these concepts and turn them into a new, useful product.

Scientists today continue to scour through his notes. Many of his far-flung theories are just now being proven by our top scientists. For example, the Tesla bladeless disk turbine engine that he designed, when coupled with modern materials, is proving to be among the most efficient motors ever designed. His 1901 patented experiments with cryogenic liquids and electricity provide the foundation for modern superconductors. He talked about experiments that suggested particles with fractional charges of an electron - something that scientists in 1977 finally discovered - quarks!

Tesla was one of the world's most original and greatest inventors and thinkers, but because he was so original and out of his time, his genius was mistaken for insanity and science fiction. Maybe next time, the world will recognize a true genius when it comes around.

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