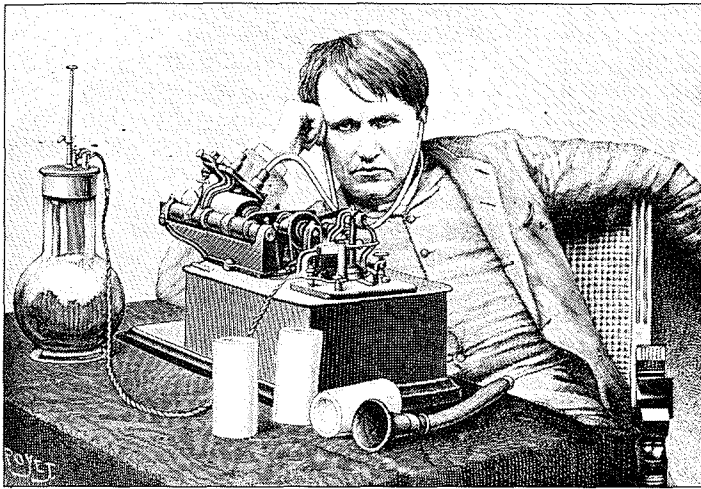


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Edison, shown listening to a phonograph, thought that it would be used for dictation and that its recorded cylinder—the phonogram—would replace the letter and memo in American business.

but it took only one success to pay for all the failures, notes Millard.

Once a product showed signs of success, Edison moved quickly. By 1910, Thomas A. Edison Incorporated (TAE) was making phonographs, film projectors, electric fans, and storage batteries. Edison was also an early practitioner of “vertical integration”: His company controlled each stage of production, from the raw materials to the finished product. To better serve his

diverse customers (ranging from railroad companies to filmmakers), he created a separate division for each major product, with separate managers and finances. This divisional structure “became the standard of business organization in the 20th century,” starting with General Motors and DuPont.

Unfortunately, says Millard, “Although TAE Inc.’s divisional structure was years ahead of its time, Edison remained firmly committed to personal leadership in the mold of the 19th-century family business.” His control al-

lowed him to impose his old-fashioned tastes on TAE. Because he hated jazz, his company completely missed the great boom in popular music of the 1920s. Edison also hired professional managers and then overruled their decisions, costing him his technological leadership. Edison died in 1931, but thanks to his strategy of diversification, his company weathered the Great Depression. His reputation for business acumen, however, did not.

SOCIETY

Why Infants Die

“America’s Infant-Mortality Puzzle” by Nicholas Eberstadt, in *The Public Interest* (Fall 1991), 1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 530, Washington, D.C. 20036.

One of America’s great shames is its unusually high infant-mortality rate. Although the rate has been steadily declining for many years (from 12.6 deaths per 1,000 infants in 1980 to 9.1 in 1990), it is still much higher than in other developed nations, notes Eberstadt, a researcher with the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies. In 1987, for example, it was almost 20 percent higher than the rate in Norway, nearly 50 percent

higher than in the Netherlands, and twice as high as in Japan. Yes, some countries underreport, Eberstadt says, but Australia and Canada, whose reporting practices are similar to those in this country, also have markedly lower infant-mortality rates.

Poverty, the chief culprit in most analyses, is not the real problem, Eberstadt finds. According to one study, for example, child-poverty rates in Australia and the United States were virtually identical

in 1980, yet the U.S. infant-mortality rate was nearly one-fifth higher. The explanation also does not appear to be inadequate health care. At any given birth weight, he notes, American infants have a *higher* survival rate than do Japanese or Norwegian babies. The problem is that Americans, white as well as black, have a high incidence of risky, low-weight births.

Some argue that biology may be a factor, since the proportion of low-birth-weight babies born to blacks is roughly twice as high as for whites. But Eberstadt blames irresponsible parental attitudes and behavior. A 1982 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) found that low birth weight has a much lower correlation with poverty than with heavy smoking by pregnant women. Ba-

bies born to mothers who smoked 15 or more cigarettes a day had an incidence of low birth weight three times greater than those born to nonsmokers.

Bearing a child out of wedlock is another symptom of irresponsibility, Eberstadt notes, and it too significantly reduces an American child's chances of survival. A college-educated woman who bore an illegitimate child in 1982, for example, was more likely to lose her baby within a year than was even a grade-school dropout who was married.

If the parents' attitudes and behavior are important in determining infants' chances of surviving, Eberstadt concludes, then the prospects for bringing down the infant-mortality rate through government action may not be very good.

The Liberation Of 'White Trash'

"Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865" by Stephen V. Ash, in *The Journal of Southern History* (Feb. 1991), Rice Univ., P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77251.

Although American historians have lavished attention on the freeing of the slaves during the Civil War, they have virtually ignored the fact that the North's conquest also "began the liberation" of the South's poor whites, writes Ash, an historian at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The antebellum South's impoverished whites were mostly agricultural folk—tenant farmers, overseers for large planters, hired hands on yeoman farms, and squatters "who eked out a bare existence on the unclaimed lands of the piney woods, the sand hills, the swamps, or the mountains." Their patrician betters looked down on them as "poor white trash," devoid of honor and little better than slaves. In the eyes of the Union soldiers who marched into Dixie, however, the poor whites seemed, at first glance, to be oppressed wretches eagerly awaiting deliverance.

Many poor whites did welcome the northern soldiers as liberators. The number of whites who fled to the Yankees may well have equaled or exceeded the number who sought sanctuary behind Rebel lines. A Yankee general leading his troops through hill country in Tennessee in 1863

wrote that poor white men who had been hiding from Confederate conscription "rushed into the road and joined our column, expressing the greatest delight at our coming." Some poor whites enlisted in Union armies.

For most of the impoverished, simple survival was the main concern, but many nevertheless became determined to seize the opportunity afforded by invasion and occupation to better their lot. "Some settled temporarily in refugee camps and then went north to work," Ash writes. "Others found employment on plantations recently deserted by slaves. But many had a more ambitious goal: securing land of their own. Without federal assistance or encouragement, poor whites in considerable numbers began occupying abandoned land in and near Union lines."

Like the newly emancipated slaves, the poor whites "defied their oppressors . . . and voted with their feet for liberty and opportunity." For a moment, Ash says, "white society in the South seemed to stand on the brink of vast upheaval." But the moment passed and poor whites' militancy ebbed. The Confederate surrender at