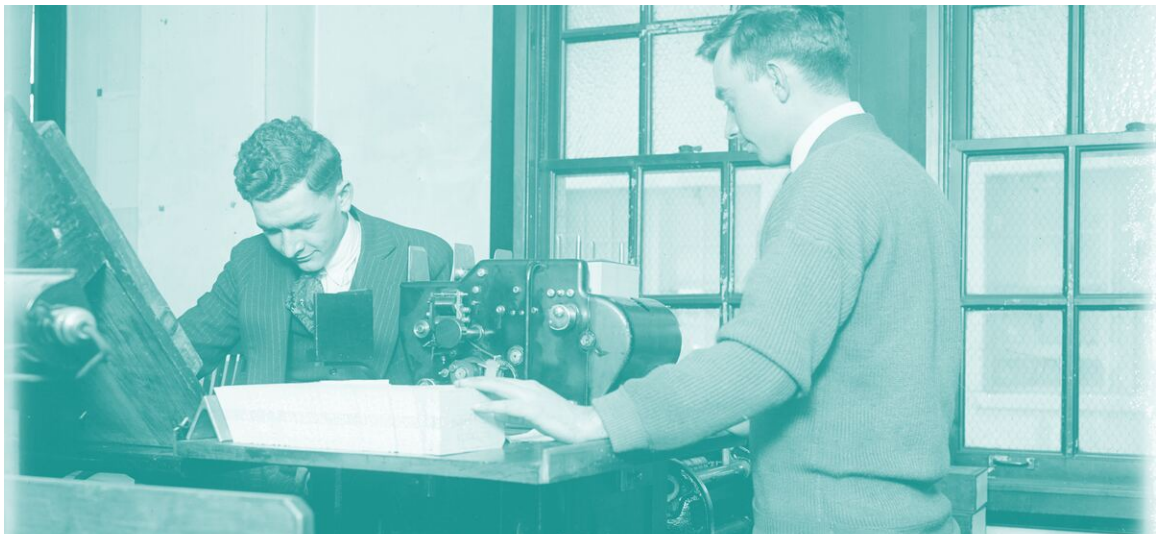
Afterword

Samuel Hammond



Tabulating machines at the U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, c. 1910s–20s.
Library of Congress, National Photo Company Collection.

EVERY MAJOR TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSITION IN HUMAN HISTORY HAS DRIVEN THE development of new institutions and forms of governance. The agricultural revolution transitioned relatively communal hunter-gatherer societies into hierarchical city-states, replacing tribal norms with early legal codes and a stratified division of labor. The printing revolution in Europe drove the transition from fragmented, feudal kingdoms to consolidated nation-states with professionalized militaries and bureaucracies. And then, less than two centuries ago, industrialization spurred the growth of modern regulatory and welfare states in order to manage a step change in economic complexity.

Broadly speaking, technology drives institutional change through two primary mechanisms. Either the technology unlocks qualitatively new capabilities that change the shape and structure of efficient organizations, or the technology itself introduces novel risks and externalities that force an institutional response. The lessons from history suggest that these forces tend to work together.

With transformative AI on the horizon, we thus have every reason to expect that equally transformative change is coming for our institutions, including bedrock structures that we have long taken for granted. On the one hand, the qualitative capabilities unlocked by armies of super intelligent AI agents at our fingertips are certain to disrupt incumbent industries through novel, AI-native organizations that produce once-scarce

goods and services in abundance. On the other hand, managing the risks and externalities created by the democratization of powerful AI capabilities will necessitate the formation of new institutions in their own right.

Policymakers in DC and around the world struggle to imagine radically different near-futures. Politicians, in particular, tend to think autoregressively, expecting the future to resemble the recent past, when they're not simply distracted by interest groups or the imperative of winning their next election. In the early 1990s, Francis Fukuyama went so far as to suggest that Western liberal democracies had reached the "End of History," as though we had converged to an institutional template that would persist for all time.

In fairness to these policymakers, the last 40 years has been a period of relative stagnation. My great-grandparents' generation experienced electrification, the first mass-produced automobile, the rise of commercial aviation, and the transition from radio to television. In the time since, cars have become safer and more fuel-efficient, flying has become much more affordable, and televisions have become higher-definition. Aside from steady progress in computers and software, the developed world has thus all but forgotten what *real* technological change looks like. This has led to a kind of complacency that increasingly risks turning into panic as the digital revolution begins to finally pay off through the advent of superhuman machine intelligences.

Navigating the next decade will require shedding both complacency and panic in favor of pragmatism and farsightedness, just as the success of the United States over the last 250 years is owed to the pragmatic and farsighted vision of its founders. Indeed, from the *Federalist Papers* to the First Amendment, the U.S. was in a sense founded as the first "printing-press-native" country. Freed from Europe's rootedness in premodern history, America thus dominated the twentieth century through institutional innovations that implicitly embraced a spirit of ongoing technological development.

Given the accelerating rate of progress in AI and adjacent fields, no one knows what the world of 2035 will look like. But without an existing template to fall back on, that simply means the job of actively crafting the future is once again up to us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samuel Hammond is director of Super Intelligence Policy and chief economist at the Foundation for American Innovation, where his research focuses on super intelligence and the institutional impact of emerging technologies. He previously worked as the director of social policy for the Niskanen Center, where he remains a senior fellow; as an economist for the Government of Canada specializing in regional economic development; and as a graduate research fellow for the Mercatus Center at George Mason University.



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