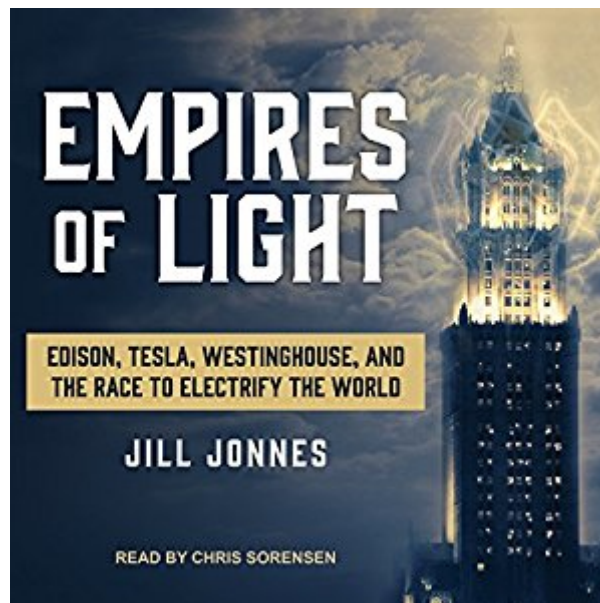




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# Empires Of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, And The Race To Electrify The World



## Synopsis

In the final decades of the 19th century, three brilliant and visionary titans of America's Gilded Age - Thomas Edison, Nikola Tesla, and George Westinghouse - battled as each vied to create a vast and powerful electrical empire. In *Empires of Light*, historian Jill Jonnes portrays this extraordinary trio and their riveting and ruthless world of cutting-edge science, invention, intrigue, money, death, and hard-eyed Wall Street millionaires. At the heart of the story are Thomas Alva Edison, the nation's most famous and folksy inventor, creator of the incandescent light bulb and mastermind of the world's first direct current electrical light networks; the Serbian wizard of invention Nikola Tesla, an eccentric dreamer who revolutionized the generation and delivery of electricity; and the charismatic George Westinghouse, Pittsburgh inventor and corporate entrepreneur, an industrial idealist who in the era of gaslight imagined a world powered by cheap and plentiful electricity and worked heart and soul to create it. *Empires of Light* is the gripping history of electricity, the "mysterious fluid", and how the fateful collision of Edison, Tesla, and Westinghouse left the world utterly transformed.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 16 hours and 51 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: January 31, 2017

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01NBYH2WP

Best Sellers Rank: #75 in Books > Science & Math > Physics > Electromagnetism > Electricity  
#240 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Reference > History #249  
in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Technology & Engineering

## Customer Reviews

Illuminating history of three men who moved us into a brighter world, and the dark side of history in this account that never reached American history classes. The author attempts to spice up what could be a dry subject with too many adjectives, which tends to undermine the credibility of the historical interpretation in places, but overall a very worthwhile read.

I love books on history and the advances of man. This book presents the abbreviated biographies of three great inventive pioneers woven together with the story of the use and advancement of electricity. While we take the use of electricity and the many instruments that function because of electricity for granted, this book presents in a well organized fashion the difficulties overcome in its development. From DC to AC. From Arc lighting to the famous incandescent bulbs. Wow, how the developments of these men and their ideas of what electricity could give to the world such a remarkable power harnessed to make man's life a little easier. Tracing the ideas to fruition of these great men, interweaves the capitalist mentality required to make a dream live. There is so much written in such a short book, and yet I found difficulty in putting the book down as it was an enjoyable read.

This book gives an individual account of these three great electrical pioneers and inventors, but also shows how their work and their lives were interconnected. Both Tesla and Westinghouse started at university but did not complete, and Thomas Edison did not even complete grade school. As well as their electrical inventions, they all branched out into associated fields. Tesla made radio transmissions before Marconi; Edison invented the phonograph and also a way of extracting iron ore by magnetism, and George Westinghouse pioneered the steam turbine for marine propulsion in USA. Long after his death in 1914, Westinghouse steam turbines were installed in the world's fastest liner, ss United States, in 1952. On a personal level the three men were courteous and approachable; Westinghouse treated his employees very well but Edison was not so generous to his. Westinghouse had a long and happy marriage and Edison was married twice, with six children who saw very little of their workaholic father. Nikola Tesla lived into his eighties, but remained unmarried, and was said to have lived a celibate life. He died alone in a New York hotel room in 1943. At the end of the book, the author reminds us that electric light has changed the true meaning of 'night'; we have lost the character and the poetry of the night that earlier generations knew. Before his death, Tesla said he had 'an inexpressible satisfaction that my polyphase system has lightened the burdens of mankind and increased their comfort and happiness'

I think people need to know more about American history. This is a great start for electricians, people interested in history, or people interested in technology.

I found this book a fascinating read of the early days of electricity and the founding fathers of

electrical technology.

What caught my attention initially was that it was about Tesla, Edison and Westinghouse. Those relationships are well represented as is the "War of the Currents". This book goes into a lot of interesting detail. For example, Edison didn't personally purchase animals and electrocute them. Another man did although he had the backing of Edison. There's a lot more to the Tesla, Westinghouse, and alternating current story than I was aware of. Also the book goes back in history describing the evolution of electricity. I learned in grade school about Benjamin Franklin and his key and kite, but now I understand what caused him to do it and what he learned from it. Michael Faraday's work was a mystery to me but now I better understand. Plus the thing is easy reading.

You'll like this if you enjoy Erik Larson books. It's subject matter is less sensational than Larson usually goes for, but it's no less fascinating. For the better part of the last century, Thomas Edison has held an almost mythological place in American culture, commonly referred to as a wizard. Tesla has picked up a lot of cachet in recent years as the narrative has veered towards Edison being an evil bastard who crushed his superior rival with dirty business tricks. The truth is a lot more interesting than the Edison myth or the Tesla over-correction. Neither contains much information about George Westinghouse, who was even more important than his two counterparts in some ways. This book does a great job of depicting all three men, their achievements, their flaws, their circumstances, and their relations with one another in bringing the practical use of electricity to the world.

As the title indicates this book focuses on the accomplishments and rivalries of three men who in the last quarter of the 19th century electrified America. Of the three men featured, Westinghouse is perhaps the least remembered but comes across as the most likable. Apparently honest, fair, an employer who was concerned about those working with him from inventors to line employees. Interestingly, all three to a lesser or greater extent fell victim to the financial giants of their time, most notably J.P. Morgan. The book is well written and informative. Competent if not inspired. The ending is a bit weak, but overall this reader found it worthwhile.

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