

Series Foreword

Is it possible to go an entire day in our interconnected, technology-mediated world without hearing the word “innovation” at least once? Used for everything from marketing gimmicks to truly game-changing breakthroughs, innovation has simultaneously become a goal, a measure of success, and a compulsion for many individuals and corporations. We are urged to be innovative at work and in our personal lives, and to help our children be innovative as well. What are the pros and cons of this mandate to innovate? This volume begins to answer that question by putting champions of innovation in conversation with those who question the imperative to innovate, as well as those who trust in the imperative but see ways to improve it. The result is a richly textured picture of the ubiquity of innovation in American life.

Invention and innovation have long been recognized as transformational forces in American history, not only in technological realms but also in politics, society, and culture, and they are arguably more important than previously thought in other societies as well. Innovation especially has become a universal watchword of the twenty-first century, so much so that nations are banking their futures on its economic and social effects.

Since 1995, the Smithsonian’s Lemelson Center has been investigating the history of invention and innovation from broad interdisciplinary perspectives. Books in the Lemelson Center Studies in Invention and Innovation continue this work to enhance public understanding of humanity’s inventive impulse. Authors in the series raise new questions about the work of inventors and the technologies they create, while stimulating cross-disciplinary dialogue. By opening channels of communication between the various disciplines and sectors of society concerned with technological

innovation, the Lemelson Center Studies advance scholarship in the history of technology, engineering, science, architecture, the arts, and related fields and disseminate it to a general interest audience.

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