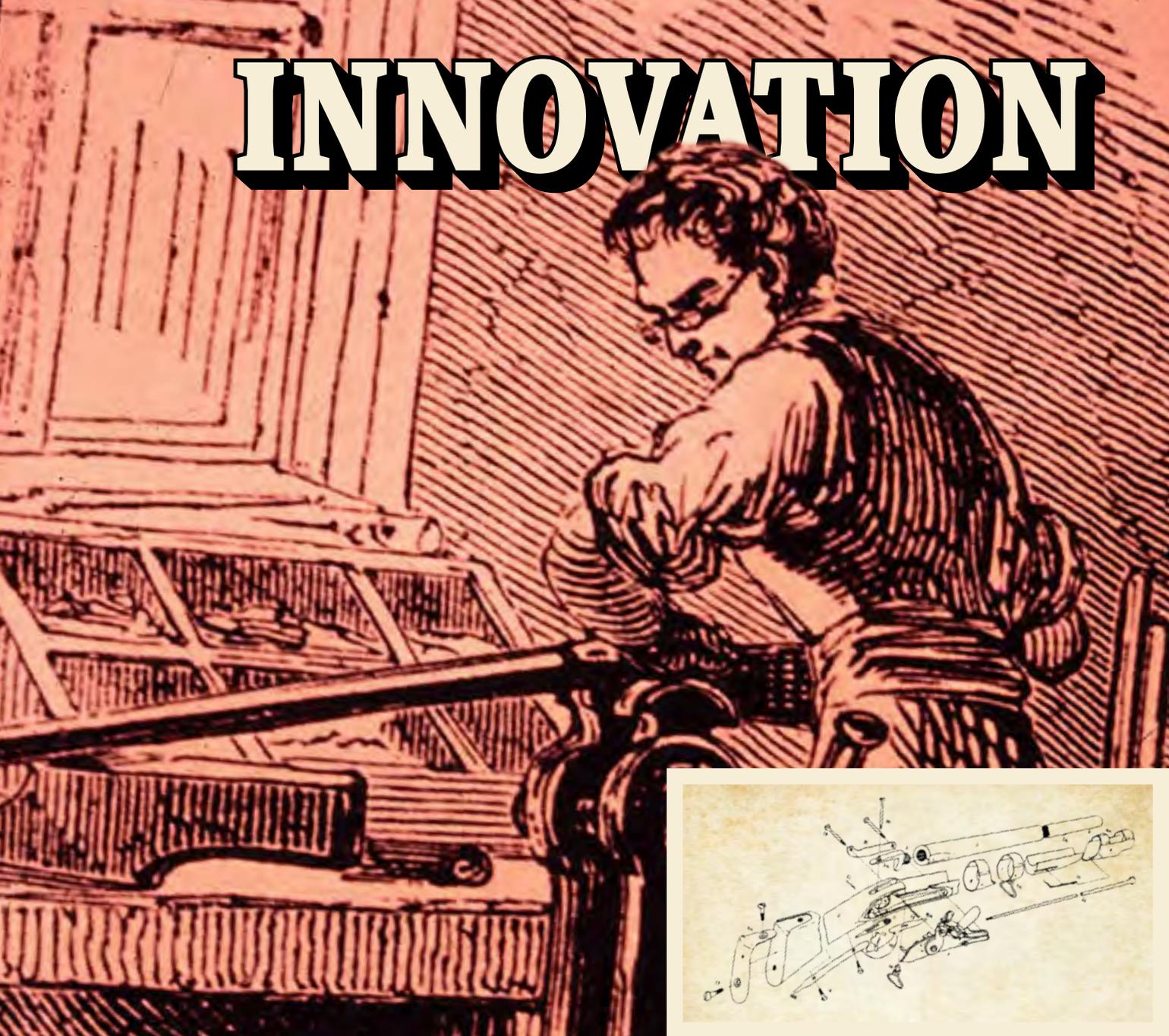


INNOVATION



“Innovation” isn’t a word that 21st century Americans ordinarily associate with government. But since the earliest days of the Republic, the U.S. government has been a catalyst for technological advances.

In 1815, when Congress established national armories in Springfield (MA) and Harpers Ferry (VA), its primary purpose was to promote production of military firearms with standardized, interchangeable parts. But the infusion of government money

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had a much broader impact, particularly in the area surrounding the Springfield Armory, where skilled gunsmiths, mechanics, and machinists exchanged ideas and sometimes established factories and machine shops of their own, using the techniques they perfected while working at the armory.

“By the 1850s,” write the authors of *Inventing America*, “armory methods could be found in factories making sewing machines, pocket watches, padlocks, railway equipment, shoes, wagons, and hand tools. And the key transmitters of these methods were New England machine-tool firms closely connected with the Springfield Armory.”

And not to belabor the point, but it was a government initiative that set everything in motion.

“All well and good,” you say, “but has the government done anything to spur innovation in more modern times?”

The short answer is yes. (Think “rocket science.”)

In 1961, President John Kennedy committed America to putting a man on the moon by the end of the decade. NASA—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—got the job done with a few months to spare. In July of 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin walked on the moon’s surface, thanks to a government-funded, government-managed program.

Still not convinced? There’s more. (This time, think “cyberspace.”)



Buzz Aldrin on the Moon, 1969
Image: NASA

