



Text Version of Audio Story: Time

I was recently on a jet from Baltimore to Chicago, and the pilot's voice came over the loudspeaker. *"This is the captain speaking. We've begun our descent for Chicago, and the good news is we'll be reaching the gate a minute and a half early."* A journey of 700 miles, and we have it timed down to within two minutes. It's amazing.

In America we are obsessed with time. Time management is every bit as important these days as money management.

They say, *"Time is money."* They also say things like, *"time waits for no man" ... "a stitch in time" ... "time marches on."* The song says, *"If I could save time in a bottle."* If you don't like someone, you don't give them *the time of day.*

It is so important, a popular magazine is named after it ... and the most famous town square in the word is named in honor of it.

Most people complain they don't have enough time. Then there are those people who complain they got too much ... hard time. We measure our lives in minutes and hours. This obsession with time is a relatively new phenomenon.

In colonial America only the incredibly rich had watches. They carried them on heavy gold chains as a show of wealth. They weren't really practical. You couldn't look at your watch and say, *"Okay, I'll meet you back here at the Liberty Bell in an hour."* Because the person you were talking to probably didn't have a watch.

The workday in colonial America wasn't nine-to-five. It was sunup to sundown. There were no alarm clocks. A good old rooster took care of that.

We measure time by watching a second hand tick, tick, tick. The Indians measured time by watching the moon change shapes. Farmers measured time in seasons.

Mary Todd Lincoln wore a wristwatch to her husband's inauguration. It was considered such a novelty that it got more attention than the president.

With the beginning of the 20th century, the way we viewed time was about to change dramatically.

There was this guy, and he had this thing ... an invention, that he said would revolutionize America.

He needed people to build this thing, and to make sure he got the most out of his workers, he lined them up and gave them each a repetitive job and timed their work.

Of course, that guy was Henry Ford, and his *thing* was the *automobile*. With Mr. Ford's thing came the industrial revolution, and workers were required to build all kinds of things ... and built them in an allotted amount of time.

Time really did become money, and Americans started to value their time. Everyone needed a wristwatch. It made wearers incredibly conscious of time and whether or not they were *wasting it*, or *making good time*.

We could now schedule appointments. And if we weren't on time, it was our fault.

And, yet, as conscious as we were of time management, it ironically seemed we had less of it ... less time for ourselves; less time for our families; less time for our homes and communities. So we had to hire people to mow our grass and paint our houses and haul our garbage to the dump and dust the furniture and wash the windows.

All the things we were used to doing, we didn't have time for anymore. It didn't make any sense, because we were managing our time now. It became all the rage to purchase time-saving devices.

I recently read a report on the average speed of traffic on New York City streets. It said that in the 1800s, horse and carriage traffic moved along at about 14 miles an hour. But now, with the advent of the automobile, the average speed of traffic on New York City streets has dropped to 11 miles per hour.

Thanks for nothing, Henry.

I'm the American Storyteller.