

TECHNOLOGY | THE BACK STORY

AI Will Create—and Destroy—Jobs. History Offers a Lesson.

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That AI technology will come for jobs is certain. The destruction and creation of jobs is a defining characteristic of the Industrial Revolution. Less certain is what kind of new jobs—and how many—will take their place.

Some scholars divide the Industrial Revolution into three stages: steam, which started around 1770; electricity, in 1870; and information in 1950. Think of the automobile industry replacing the horse-and-carriage trade in the first decades of the 20th century, or IT departments supplanting secretarial pools in recent decades.

In all of these cases, some people get left behind. The new jobs can be vastly different in nature, requiring novel skills and perhaps relocation, such as from farm to city in the first Industrial Revolution.