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## United States History II Honors: Biographical Research Project

Everyone has heard of inventors like Thomas Edison or Samuel Morse, but one of the many great inventors to go overlooked is George Eastman. Eastman has revolutionized the world of photography. Today taking photos has become effortless, but it wasn't always that way. Eastman was born in Waterville, NY on July 12, 1854, and spent his early childhood in a large farm owned by his parents. His father George W. Eastman, a teacher, ran a college in Rochester, New York. His mother, Maria Kilbourn, took care of young George and his two older sisters. Later in 1860, as his health began to deteriorate, George's father gave up the farm and moved his family to Rochester. His father died when he was seven, two years after the family moved to Rochester. His mother was forced to take in boarders to add to the family's small income. Eastman also had two older sisters, Ellen Maria and Katie. Katie was afflicted with polio at a very young age and was confined to a wheelchair. She died in 1870 leaving her family distraught. George was educated in Rochester public schools but dropped out at age fourteen to work and help his mother. His first job, as a messenger boy with an insurance firm, paid \$3 a week.

A year later, he became an office boy for another insurance firm. He soon took charge of policy filing and even wrote policies. His pay increased to \$5 per week. But, even with that increase, his income was not enough to meet family expenses. He studied accounting at home to get a better paying job. In 1874, after five years in the insurance business, he was hired as a junior clerk at the Rochester Savings Bank. His salary increased to more than \$15 a week. Although the job of the book keeper solved his financial problems, Eastman strived for more. He soon decided to take up the real estate and by 1877 he had saved enough money to take the first step. At that time, Hispaniola, located in the Caribbean, was undergoing a boom in land. Eastman decided to go there and investigate for himself. To document his visit, he bought a camera.

Although he never made the journey, he became fully engrossed in photography. In the 1870s American photography was still slow, difficult, and expensive. Equipment included a huge camera, strong tripod, large plate holder, dark tent, chemicals, water container, and heavy glass plates. At the time, photography was still a fairly recent development, and taking pictures was not easy. Photographers had to cover glass slides with a solution of silver and other chemicals; more chemicals were used to develop the image. This work had to be done in the dark, so photographers taking pictures outdoors had to bring along tents.

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