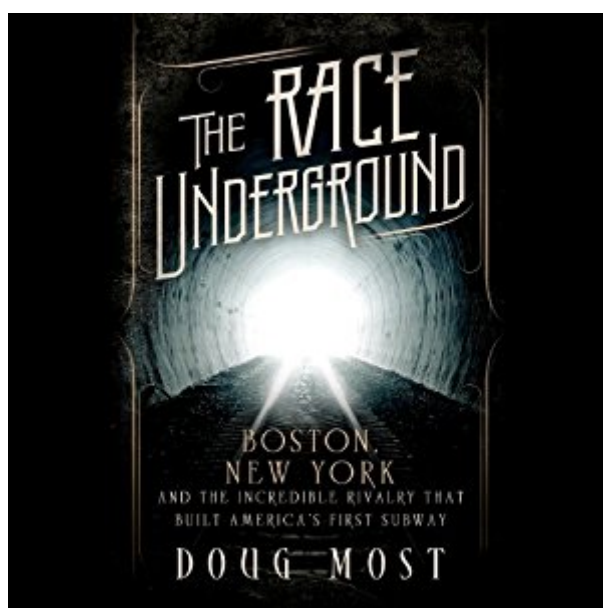


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# The Race Underground: Boston, New York, And The Incredible Rivalry That Built America's First Subway



## Synopsis

In the late nineteenth century, as cities like Boston and New York grew larger, the streets became increasingly clogged with horse-drawn carts. When the great blizzard of 1888 brought New York City to a halt, a solution had to be found. Two brothers - Henry Melville Whitney of Boston and William Collins Whitney of New York City - pursued the dream of his city being the first American metropolis to have a subway and the great race was on. The competition between Boston and New York was played out in an era not unlike our own, one of economic upheaval, job losses, bitter political tensions, and the question of America's place in the world. *The Race Underground* is peopled with the famous, like Boss Tweed, and Thomas Edison, and the not-so-famous, like the countless "sandhogs" who dug and blasted into the earth's crust, sometimes losing their lives in the process of building the subway's tunnels. Doug Most chronicles the science of the subway, looks at fears people had about travelling underground and tells a story as exciting as any ever ripped from the pages of U.S. history. *The Race Underground* is a great American saga of two rival American cities, the powerful interests within, and an invention that changed the lives of millions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Main focus of the book is on the personalities, funding and contract issue of building the Boston and NYC subways as well as some details of how the construction was done, and I found that quite interesting. Lesser focus on the engineering. However, Sprague's engineering work on the early 12 miles Richmond system is discussed in a few pages, but not as much detail as in the PBS special

on the Race Underground. A curious lack I thought is there is nothing in the book about the first generation of subway cars that ran in the tunnels, no mention of who built them, their size or power requirements or how they were powered by the 3rd rail..

The Race Underground captures a compelling story of the challenges associated with progress of mass transit. The author does a very good job of portraying the practical challenges that led to the creation of the subways in Boston, New York (and a handful of other cities) while also painting personal portraits of the individuals involved. Well written, entertaining and a fascinating look into the history of something we take for granted today.

If you saw the PBS production, then you have to have this book!!! The PBS production was fantastic & this book is also beautifully written. Actually, anyone interested in electric traction, should read this great tome, & then and watch the PBS program for a better experience (even if you watched the program the first time).

This book was thoroughly fun. I really enjoyed it, living as I do in Boston, and having lived in New York, and seeing how the subway system was conceived and built in both cities was interesting. I'm no specialist, so it was readable and interesting without being so detailed that I felt I was plowing through information that just got in the way. Boston won the "race" by the way. I also had the unusual experience of reading the book on the red line of the Boston subway, which was stuck in numerous slowdowns and service delays (and a complete shutdown of the subway due to a blizzard) over the week of January 26th to 29th, 2015. The lousy service added a full hour (and in one case, two hours) to my commute. The subways still need a good deal of work, but I'm glad they exist, though reading about service delays in the 19th century while stuck underground in the 21st, was somewhat ironic.

I like history, and I like infrastructure. This book brought two together in a very informative and interesting style. It was almost like a novel, making me feel like I was living in the 19th century when the bulk of the book is centered. It was clear that this was not an academic thesis, nor is it a collection of regurgitated newspaper articles. Because of my hectic schedule I wound reading it in small chunks over a couple of weeks. If I had the option, I could easily have read it in a couple of sittings because it was that interesting. The traversal across time and geography, move around at a pace that kept you wanting to see how it all came together. While the subject is not suspenseful, the

distribution of facts combined with historical context and personal perspectives made it an intriguing story.

This is a great book for history buffs, very suspenseful, great character development, excellent technical details. Yes, a book about building a subway can be just as interesting and fun to read as any piece of fiction. Brave heroes, stupid politicians, greedy developers, egos, underpaid and overworked manual labor, it will definitely hold your attention. Never thought I'd even like this kind of book! It tells an important story, every bit of it true.

I enjoyed reading this book, but it was not on the level of some of the great non-fiction books that have been released. The history was interesting to me, but I felt it jumped around a little bit too much and it seemingly tried too much to tie the fortunes of Boston and New York together when they really weren't. By attempting to tie them together, it jumped from one city to the other in different chapters / sections and I am not sure it worked as a literary device for me. The information was great and it was a good, solid read. It just wasn't a special, have to read book for me to tell people about.(less)

The actual events in the tunnel are gripping, but that's only about 1/3 of the book. The pre-event setup - character backstories, etc - are OK, but not fully engaging. The post-event stuff is unfulfilling and a bit dull, with all the usual "this horrible things happened and look how little has changed".

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