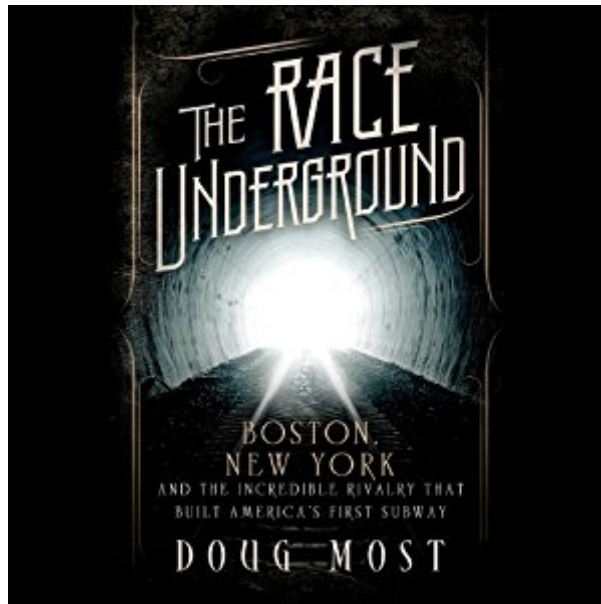


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# The Race Underground: Boston, New York, And The Incredible Rivalry That Built America's First Subway



## 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

I have always been fascinated with subway systems - their operation, their construction and their evolution. I have ridden and explored the subway systems in cities as diverse as London, Paris, Moscow, Montreal, Seoul, Singapore, San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, D.C., NYC and Boston. From my first experiences as a kid riding the El from Everett to Boston Garden to see the

circus right up to today for my daily commute on the Red Line, the MBTA has been a part of my life. I have known from reading the signs at Park Street that the MBTA Green Line was the first subway line in America. I had no idea how closely tied together were the stories of the construction of the NYC subways and the Boston subways. This fascinating new book tells those parallel stories in a way that brings the history to light and to life. Two brothers from the powerful Whitney family each played a role in creating what have become Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority and New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority. These two brothers—Henry Melville Whitney of Boston and William Collins Whitney of New York City - were at the centers of the beehives of political intrigue, financial manipulations, real estate deals and engineering innovations in a desperate attempt to help their respective cities solve the problem of street traffic that threatened to strangle both metropolises. This true story of rivalry and cooperation reads like a Gothic novel, and is peopled with familiar figures like Thomas Edison, Boss Tweed, Grover Cleveland and Frederick Law Olmstead. The author, Doug Most, digs deep into a large storehouse of primary documents to get to the real story and subplots of how both systems came to be built.

In my twenties, I often rode the Boston subway from Arlington station to Park Street without having any idea that this short run was the first section of electric powered subway to be opened anywhere in the world. In *The Race Underground*, Doug Most tells this story as part of a compelling portrait of two great Gilded Age cities struggling to progress from a pre-industrial transportation system to a world powered by a newly harnessed source of energy. New York and Boston experienced explosive growth in the 19th century. With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, New York was transformed into a hub for American imports and exports. Population grew from a pre-Canal level of 170,000 to 1.2 million by 1880. New York and Boston were the first and fourth largest American cities at the time and each grew daily as immigrants flooded into their environs. Unfortunately, transportation infrastructure changed little as this growth occurred. Horse-pulled streetcars had served for 50 years but "slowly began to cripple two great American cities." The *New York Tribune* argued that a traveler could journey halfway to Philadelphia in less time than he could traverse the length of Broadway. *American Architect and Building News* characterized Boston's sidewalks as "jammed to suffocation." In addition to the crowding was the stench from piles of manure which could include as much as 50 pounds a day for each of the thousands of horses in both cities. "Urban transport," argues Most, "had become the single biggest civic headache. Traffic was an outright obsession of newspapers and their readers." And the only direction to look to ease the congestion was Down. *The Race Underground* focuses most fully on how each city developed the

public will to confront this problem.

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