



# THE RACER UNDERGROUND

1x60 HD

PUBLIC GARDEN ENTRANCE

NO SMOKING

NO SMOKING



PBS

INTERNATIONAL



# THE RACE UNDERGROUND

1 x 60 HD

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In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as America's teeming cities grew increasingly congested, the time had come to replace the nostalgic horse-drawn trolleys with a faster, cleaner, safer, and more efficient form of transportation. Ultimately, it was Boston—a city of so many firsts—that overcame a litany of engineering challenges, the greed-driven interests of businessmen, and the great fears of its citizenry to construct America's first subway. Based in part on Doug Most's acclaimed non-fiction book of the same name, *The Race Underground* tells the dramatic story of an invention that changed the lives of millions.

In the late 1800s, Boston reigned as America's most crowded city, with nearly 400,000 people packed into a downtown of less than one square mile. With more than 8,000 horses pulling the trolleys, the city was filthy and noisy, reeking of manure and packed with humanity.

But a young American inventor named Frank Sprague had a revolutionary idea. Inspired by his visits to the London Underground, Sprague envisioned a subway system that would trade London's soot-spewing coal-powered steam engine with a motor run on the latest technology—electricity. After an early job with his idol Thomas Edison, Sprague launched his own venture, the Sprague Electric Railway & Motor Company. Seeking investors, he first struck out with financier Jay Gould after almost setting the mogul on fire during a demonstration. He soon found backing with the wealthy capitalist Henry Whitney, who owned a fortune in suburban Boston real estate and quickly saw the financial upside of connecting his desirable residential neighborhoods with the city's economic center. Whitney also proposed the consolidation of Boston's seven existing streetcar companies—all under his control. When the Massachusetts General Court granted Whitney the monopoly, he announced an unprecedented plan—to build the nation's first subway. Powered by Sprague's technology and enthusiastically supported by Boston Mayor Nathan Matthews, the project threw the city into a voluble debate.

The debate raged on, but the mayor finally convinced the city that the new subway would provide much-needed jobs and not infringe on the city's beloved Boston Common. After two years of construction, Boston's new subway made its first trip on September 1, 1897. Despite lingering fears, more than 250,000 Bostonians rode the underground rails on its first day. In its first year of operation, 50 million passengers would ride the Boston system, and within ten years, New York and Philadelphia opened subways, with more American cities to follow.

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## AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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### CREDITS

*Writer, Producer and Director:* Michael Rossi

*Executive Producer:* Mark Samels

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