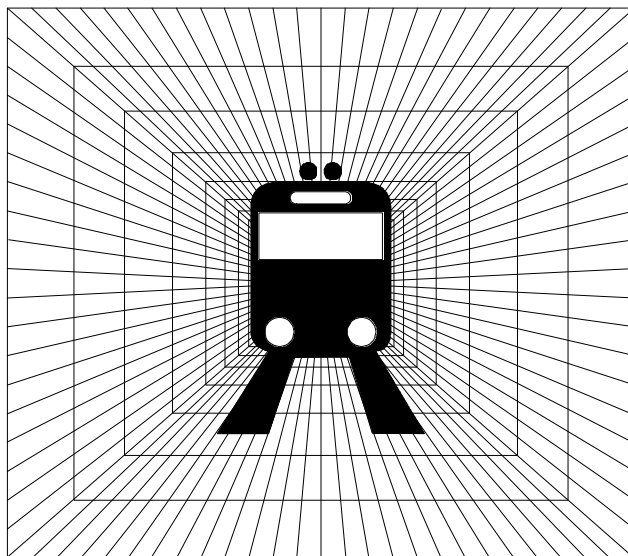


RIVER OF STEEL



CFE 3290V

OPEN CAPTIONED

DIRECT CINEMA

1993

Grade Levels: 9-13+

27 minutes

DESCRIPTION

In the late 1800s, New York City's crowded population complained about slow-moving transportation. The city and private organizations began construction on a subway in 1900. After four years, the work of 12,000 men, and many accidents, the subway opened and forever changed the shape of the city. By 1940, the system was complete. Uses vintage photographs, film, and historians' comments.

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

- To present the reasons for and process of constructing a subway in New York City.
- To examine how the New York City rapid transit system changed the city.

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Preview the video to determine unfamiliar vocabulary and language concepts.
2. Using a map of New York City, locate: Manhattan, Wall Street, Harlem, the Bronx, Times Square, Astor Place City College, Brooklyn, Queens, and Coney Island.
3. Determine the current population of New York City.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. How was the New York City subway system built?
2. How did the subway systems come to redefine the meaning of *urban scale*?
3. How does New York City "present what a free and enterprising people can do when they set themselves about it"?

4. Describe the growing pains New York City was experiencing prior to the creation of the Interborough Rapid Transit (I.R.T.).
5. Evaluate the pros and cons of living in New York City in the late 1800s.
6. Compare the London and New York City subway systems.
7. Compare the pneumatic subway, the elevated train, and the electric-powered subway.
8. Describe the humanitarian, economic, and political motivations for establishing a subway system in New York City.
9. What problems were associated with deciding who would take charge of building the subway?
10. Debate if Americans still believe that when something is needed, entrepreneurs will step forward.
11. Describe the influence of the subway on Harlem, Manhattan's Upper West Side, the Bronx, Times Square, and Coney Island.

Applications and Activities

1. What urban-planning options are available to modern urban areas experiencing economic expansion and growing pains?
2. Imagine living during the time period depicted in the video.
 - a. Write descriptions of pre-subway New York City streets from the perspective of a child, a pedestrian, a horse, or a streetcar driver.
 - b. Regarding the construction of the I.R.T., write a letter to a family member from one of the construction workers.
 - c. Role-play a dinner party conversation during the subway construction. Debate if the subway will be completed and used.
 - d. Using a visual art media, create a representation of first-time use of the subway.

- e. Write an acrostic describing the relation of one of the following people to the New York City subway system:
- (1) Alfred Ely Beach
 - (2) Charles T. Harvey
 - (3) Abram Hewitt
 - (4) August Belmont
 - (5) Russell Sage
 - (6) William Barclay Parsons
 - (7) Philip A. Payton
3. Research modern subway systems.
- a. Investigate elevated train and subway systems in other American cities. Consider size, ownership, and history.
 - b. Compare subway systems in capitalist and non-capitalist countries.
 - c. Research the current conditions of the New York City subway system. Consider accidents, crime, and cost of repairs and maintenance.
4. Acquire a current guide to using New York City's subway system. Plan a tour of the city using the subway.
5. Compare initial impressions of New York City from the perspective of an Ellis Island immigrant, a modern immigrant, and a modern American citizen.
6. Compile a bibliography of songs, films, short stories, plays, and novels related to subways.
7. Debate whether "faster is better."

WEBSITES

Explore the Internet to discover sites related to this topic. Check the CFV website for related information (<http://www.cfv.org>).

SUMMARY

In the late 1800s, an expanding economy, overpopulation, and street-traffic problems led the people of New York City to search for alternative means of

transportation. Inspired by the world's first subway system that opened in London in 1863, Alfred Ely Beach experimented with a prototype pneumatic subway which was quickly succeeded by Charles T. Harvey's "el" (elevated train). The faulty cable system that Harvey used led to his financial ruin and was replaced by a steam engine el that served New York City until 1904.

Political, economic, and humanitarian motives united diverse groups in searching for the means to build a larger scale and more efficient rapid transit system. Entrepreneurs were reluctant to tackle the costly and risky endeavor, while public funds through Tammany Hall's corrupt political machine were feared. Abram Hewitt, former mayor, proposed a public-private partnership in which the city would own the subway, finance its construction, and charge an annual rent. A private company would build, operate, and profit from the subway system.

The building of the Interborough Rapid Transit (I.R.T.) required four years and 12,000 men using a "cut and cover" method which placed the subway one story below ground. During the building process, public opinion ranged from beliefs that New Yorkers would never go into "a hole in the ground" to the subway becoming an efficient, elegant addition to the city.

Powered by electricity, the I.R.T. opened in 1904. New Yorkers thronged to use it, quickly complaining that it was too crowded and didn't go far enough. Expansion continued until 1940. Still, the subway was welcomed with songs and films. The I.R.T. changed the face of New York City, causing Harlem to become the capital of Black America, luring the well-heeled to Manhattan's Upper West Side, and creating a Jewish paradise in the Bronx. Downtown became a canyon wall of skyscrapers, Coney Island's daily weekend crowd climbed from 100,000 to 1 million people, and New Year's Eve in Times Square became a national tradition.

